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Weird Tales

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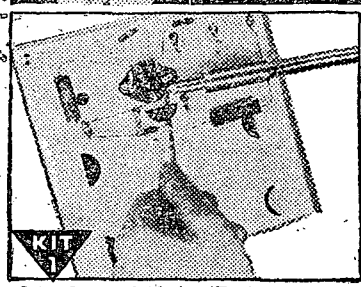
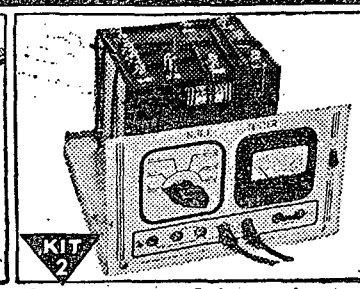
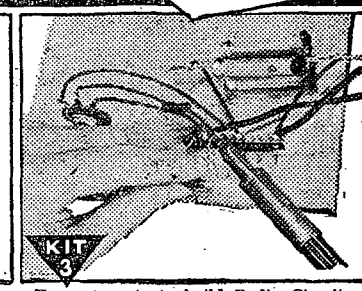


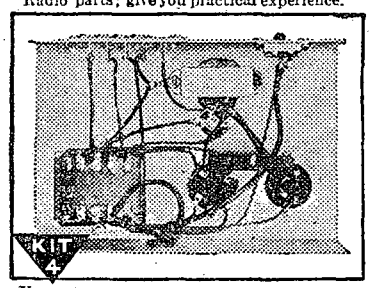
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



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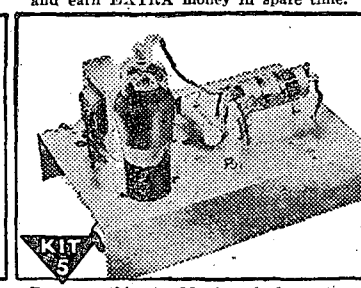

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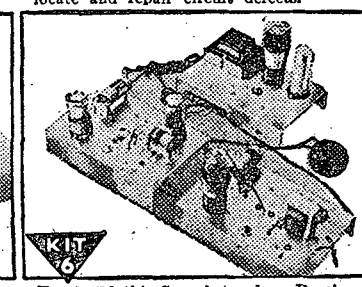

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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1948 Cover by Lee Brown Coye

NOVELETTES

THE MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN . . . . . Edmond Hamilton 4
Our universe is but one of many different branches in the road of Time, separated one from the other by an extra-dimensional abyss

THE COMING OF M. ALKERHAUS . . . . . Allison V. Harding 28
Boy meets girl. How many millions of times has that happened since the world began? But this was somehow so very different

SHORT STORIES

GHOST HUNT . . . . . H. Russell Wakefield 16
Twice before the Ghost Hunters had tried unsuccessfully to find their quarry. This was the third—and LAST—attempt!

THE LEONARDO RONDACHE . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 20
The study of black magic and how to nullify it is rewarding; it can save your life

THE LA PRELLO PAPER . . . . . Carl Jacobi 38
It was, after all, a strange countryside; but land, like a leopard, should not change its spots

SOMETHING IN WOOD . . . . . August Derleth 44
The question was, just what that "Something" was!

THE OCTOBER GAME . . . . . Ray Bradbury 52
It isn't enough to just punish someone; the suffering must be prolonged

CATNIP . . . . . Robert Bloch 57
Why should a grown-up boy be afraid of a little old lady and her tomcat? Isn't that "witch" stuff just for Hallowe'en?

THE MASTER OF THE CRABS . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 64
The Island Iribos was a jagged, lonely promontory rising out of the sea, warning away the unwary

THE PROFESSOR'S TEDDY BEAR . . . . . Theodore Sturgeon 72
"A metempsychosis is a thing that happens when a person moves from one house to another"

THE MERROW . . . . . Seabury Quinn 78
Such talk was for the mystically superstitious; for those who were either mad or childish—or both

ROMAN REMAINS . . . . . Algernon Blackwood 87
They listened and they stared but no one knew just what was to be heard or seen

VERSE

THE HOUSE . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 27

THE EYRIE 3

Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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173

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

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The Eyrie

Weird Tales, 25 Years

ON this occasion of WEIRD TALES' twenty-fifth birthday, we'd like to share with you the kind comments of Seabury Quinn and August Derleth, especially sent to us for this anniversary. These two have known and contributed to WEIRD from its earliest days; their many superb stories and always-helpful suggestions through the years have contributed in no small way to the magazine's success. And when we thank them we mean to thank, too, all the other fine contributors and friends who have helped us do the job that is your WEIRD TALES.

25th Anniversary Issue—August Derleth

FOR a quarter of a century WEIRD TALES has given those who delight in the fantastic and macabre the best in the *genre,* and it has remained the most consistently satisfying outlet of its kind. For all these years authors and readers have looked to this unique magazine as something very special, and, despite a welter of imitators, something very special it has remained. A magazine which has brought to the attention of its public the work of such authors as H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Henry S. Whitehead, Ray Bradbury, and many another fine writer has justified many times over its sterling reason for being and has earned its right to exist. When I began to read WEIRD TALES with the very first issue, I was thirteen, and I had to work at mowing lawns, chopping wood, and the like to earn the quarter that would buy the magazine. Few purchases have ever given me such lasting satisfaction.

It seems incredible that a quarter of a century has passed, and now, when I look back over those rich years of WEIRD TALES, I can experience again the wonderful delight of discovery and the deep reading satisfaction I knew in such stories as Lovecraft's *The Rats in the Walls, The Dunwich Horror, The Music of Erich Zann, The Outsider,* and others, Quinn's *The Phantom Farmhouse,* Arnold's *The Night Wire,* Smith's *A Rendezvous in Averoigne,* Whitehead's *Passing of a God,* Burks' *The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulée,* Howard's *The Black Stone,* Moore's *Shambleau,* Counselman's *The Three Marked Pennies,* Dyalhis' *When the Green Star Waned,* Wandrei's *The Red Brain,* Munn's *The Werewolf of Ponkert,* Bradbury's *The Lake,* Suter's *Beyond the Door,* Owen's *The Wind That Tramps the World,* Long's *The Hounds of Tindalos,* La Spina's *Invaders from the Dark,* Price's *Stranger from Kurdistan,* Jacobi's *Revelations in Black,* Merritt's *The Woman of the Wood,* Hamilton's *Monster-God of Mamurth,* Talman's *Two Black Bottles,* Worrell's *The Canal,* Leahy's *In Amundsen's Tent,* Bloch's *Enoch,* and countless other stories space does not permit mentioning.

These first twenty-five years have given us a rich heritage in the strange and wonderful; I have every confidence that the next twenty-five will add increasing stature to WEIRD TALES.

AUGUST DERLETH.

Weird Tales, A Retrospect—Quinn

THE vast majority of people will tell you, "I don't like ghost stories," meaning, thereby, "I am afraid of them." A relatively small minority of cultured and imaginative readers either find a sort of masochistic thrill in having the daylights scared out of them or, completely agnostic, still get a lift from reading stories of "ghoulies and ghosties, long-leggedy beasties, and things that go bump in the night." It is for this select, sophisticated minority WEIRD TALES is published, and that it has fulfilled its purpose is more than merely adequately proved by the fact that it celebrates its Silver Anniversary this issue.

Until the advent of WEIRD TALES the longest-lived magazine dedicated to the supernatural story was the *Black Cat* which first saw the light of print October, 1895,

(Continued on page 37)

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The Might-Have-Been

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

"The Might-Have-Been, with tooth accursed,
Gnaws at the piteous souls of men."
Baudelaire

GRAHAM did not dream, at first, that he had unlocked a door into infinite unknown worlds.

The possibilities of his experiment dawned on him only slowly, for he was not the type of scientist to think in sensational terms. He was a patient psychologist, who had been studying the effect of a certain subtle electromagnetic vibration upon the mind.

A graying, tired, stooped, man of forty, Graham had for months been experimenting with the effect of his ray upon animals. Then suddenly, one day, he realized its incredible potentialities.

He told Harker, the young physiologist who was his closest friend at this New York scientific research foundation,

"By means of this ray, I could enter another world!"

Harker looked puzzledly but intently at the thing Graham had built, a squat thing that a little resembled a quartz-lensed searchlight.

"Another world? I don't understand. I thought you said your ray just thrust animals' minds out of their bodies, somehow."

Graham nodded. "It does that. The mind, you know, isn't material. It's a web of electric force, an electric pattern that inhabits the brain but that can be torn away from the brain by the right force.

"My ray does that. It pushes that electric pattern of the mind out of the brain, and out of our dimensional universe completely. Harker, I'm certain it thrusts the mind into one of the other Earths!"

The other looked more puzzled than ever. "The other Earths? What do you mean?"

Graham explained. "It's a basic theory of the new physical science, that our Earth is only one of the countless *possible* Earths that might exist.

"Suppose a meteor had destroyed the first ameba on the young Earth? Then Earth today would be a planet without life. Suppose Genghis Khan had conquered Europe? Then Europe today would be a Mongol continent.

"Those are possible worlds. And the new physics says that all those possible Earths may really exist like our own—that they are merely different branches in the road of Time, separated from our own particular branch by an extra-dimensional abyss.

"Real matter couldn't cross from our branch of the Timeroad to another branch, from our Earth to one of the other possible Earths. But a mind isn't matter. A mind *could* be thrust across the abyss into one of those other might-have-been Earths, by the right force. I believe my ray is doing just that to my animal subjects' minds."

Harker looked incredulous. "And their minds come back to their bodies?"

Graham nodded. "They come back, as soon as the ray that thrust them is turned off."

The other shook his head. "It's a fantastic theory! And there's no way it can ever be proved."

Graham said thoughtfully, "If a *man's* mind were thrust across to those might-have-been Earths, it could remember when it came back."

Harker laughed. "Oh, sure. But what man would be crazy enough to let you do that to him?"

Our earth is, after all, only one of the countless possible Earths that might exist!

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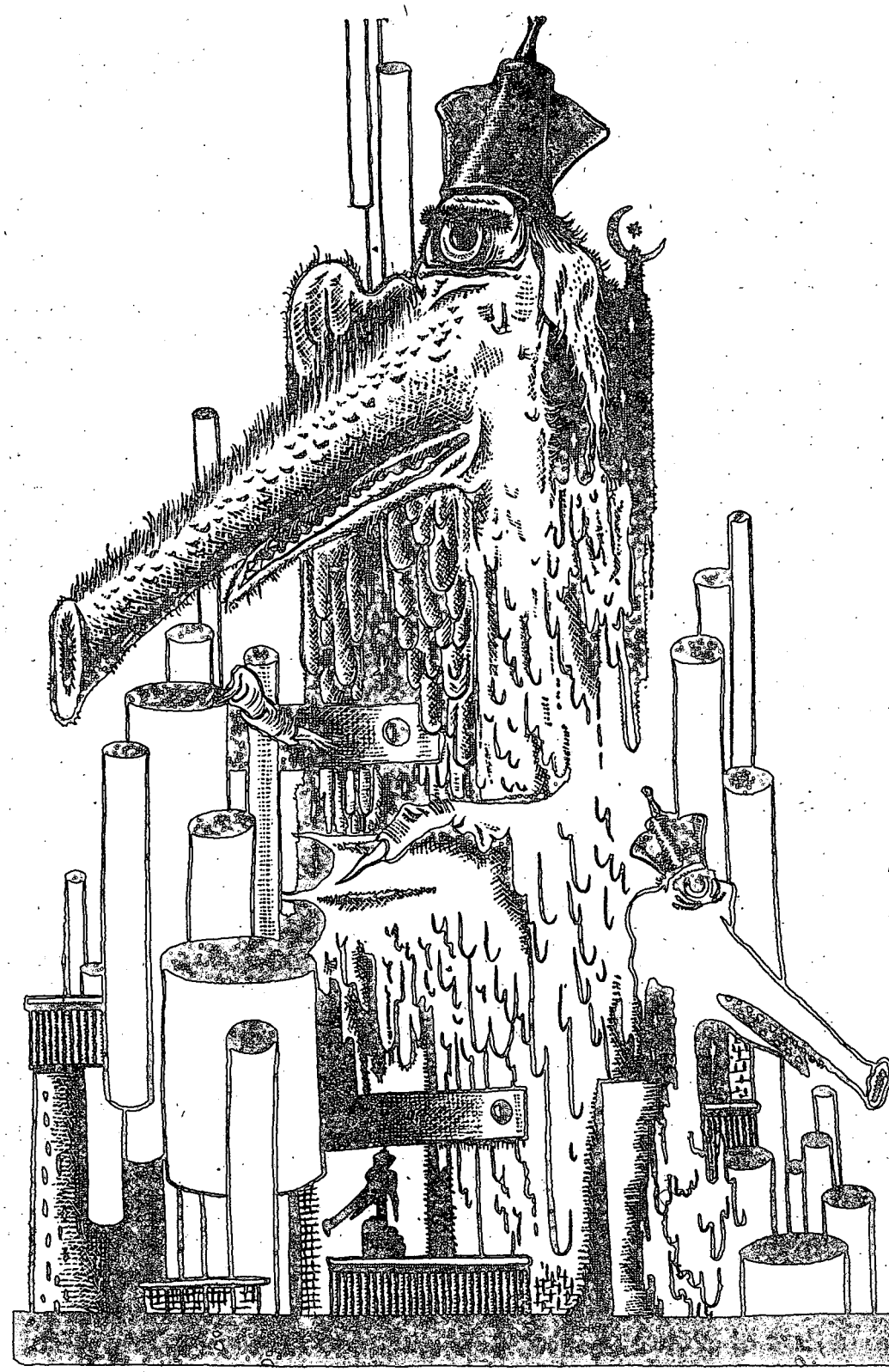

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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"Is this world of ours, in the year 1948, so blissful that a man would refuse to leave it?" Graham asked a little bitterly.

That thought recurred to him strongly that evening, when he finally closed up his laboratory and went out into the chilly winter twilight.

THE clangor of New York, the hordes of weary, pathetic, eager faces hurrying homeward in the cold and windy dusk, the skyscrapers looming like spectral castles, had never seemed so depressing to him.

His own little apartment was dark when he entered, as it had been dark for him for eight long years. Graham went heavily into the lonely rooms and turned on a lamp.

He sat in its little pool of light for hours, brooding upon the tremendous implications of his discovery.

Again and again, his thoughts returned to what he had said to Harker of its possibilities.

"—if a man's mind were thrust out of this Earth into one of those might-have-been Earths—"

Why not do that himself? Why not go across the gulf into those might-have-been worlds, himself?

He could do it, he was certain. The ray would work on his mind as on animal minds, would thrust it across into one of those other Earths.

Why not, then? Had this world, this Earth, been so kind to him that he should shrink from leaving it?

Graham looked up at the picture that watched him from the dimness above the lamplight, and the old pain wrenched his heart. In another world, another Earth, Edith would not have died—or he would not have met and loved and lost her, and been condemned to gray loneliness for the rest of his life.

And was the pain in his life exceptional? He knew that it was not. Most of the people he knew did, as Thoreau had said, lead lives of quiet desperation, lighted only by rare golden moments of happiness.

Who *wouldn't* prefer any other possible Earth to this Earth of his own, this world of 1948? A world in which millions slowly perished from hunger and indifference, in which most of humanity led stunted, starved and frustrated lives, in which a cataclysmic final war loomed close upon the horizon.

Wouldn't almost any other of the many might-have-been Earths be better than this exhausted, war-wracked world in which few men were happy, and which stumbled witlessly on toward final catastrophe?

Graham went to the window and looked out at the gaunt skyscrapers that seemed to huddle together under the somber winter night.

A sudden new excitement was singing through his blood like wine.

"And I can leave this and go into those other earths, those might-have-been Earths, where all this will never have happened!"

He knew, then, that he was going to do it.

He went through the streets to his laboratory the next morning, and he looked at New York as one might look at a prison which he is about to leave.

It was when Graham began to prepare his projector to use the ray upon himself, that caution once more tempered his excitement.

He could not calculate into what kind of might-have-been Earth the ray would thrust his mind. He was sure, by his calculations, that it would thrust his mind into the body of the might-have-been Graham of that other Earth, but what it would be like he couldn't forsee.

He decided that he would make trial, first, of several of those might-have-been worlds. He would set automatic controls on the projector, that would step up the power of the ray every few hours and then would finally turn it off altogether.

If his theory was correct, that would thrust his mind across the gulf into one might-have-been Earth after another, each time the power of the ray stepped up. And when it finally turned off, his mind would return back into this world and this brain and body.

Then he could decide which of those other worlds he wanted for a permanent refuge, and his mind at least could go back there to stay. It would take more planning, more devising of apparatus, but he could do it.

It was night when Graham finished arranging his automatic controls. He sat and

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looked into the quartz lens of the squat machine that was going to hurl his mind across the gulf to might-have-been.

The moment came, and the automatic switch of the projector closed with a *click!*

II

THERE was a thunderous moment of transition, and then Graham suddenly found himself in another body.

He did not own or control this new body. It was another man's, and he was merely an uncanny guest in its brain. He shared this other man's sensations and memories, yet the other was completely unaware of *him.*

Graham knew at once that this other man was named "Graham" too. He realized his calculations had been right, that his mind had been thrust across the gulf to a might-have-been Earth of another time-branch, and there had entered the body of a might-have-been Graham.

The other Graham was walking at this moment through dark, somber winter woods. He wore leather and wool, and a long sword upon whose hilt his hand rested often. For he knew that with each step he took, he was walking deeper into danger.

"Yet I'm glad that I came back," he muttered to himself as he strode along.

How long since he had left this land of Farther England? This was the year 1948. That meant that it was ten years since he had fled, a doom-threatened man.

"And all that time, I knew that I would some day come back here," he murmured.

Ten years! Ten years of wandering soldiering, of selling his sword to any buyer, from the bleak Viking kingdoms up north to the Portuguese slave-empire of the southern continent.

He had aged, in those years. Not so much outwardly, for time had merely put more iron into his face and his sword-arm. But he was no longer the same hot-blooded young man of twenty-nine who had ridden through these woods with the Duke's men-at-arms in deadly pursuit.

Or was he still, under his hard-bitten soldier's exterior, the same young fool? It must be, or he wouldn't be risking his neck now just to see a wife who had probably forgotten him. Edith might not even want to see him, might fear for herself and the children—

"But she didn't marry again," Graham told himself. "In all these ten years, she didn't marry again."

The wench to whom he had given his secret message for Edith had told him that.

A wolf howled, away to the north in the dark, leafless woods. Graham turned, listening keenly.

Packs of wolves could be terrible, in these forests. But after a moment, the repeated howl reassured him. That was no pack, but a lone hunter.

"They're not so plentiful," Graham thought. "Too many castles and towns around here for them now."

And as Graham thought that, the *first* Graham who was a mere watching guest in his brain realized from that brain's memories and knowledge how different this might-have-been Earth of another time-branch was from his own.

This was an Earth whose history was different, an Earth in which there had been no Renaissance, no sudden awakening from the cramped life and thinking of the Middle Ages. Because of that lack, progress had been infinitely more slow.

Not until the 18th Century had the compass and the modern sailing-ship been invented. And not until 1810 had the first English ships planted a colony in this land which was called, not "America," but Vinland, after its Norse discoverers.

Static medievalism held sway here in Farther England, as in the older continent. Feudal tyranny persisted and throttled all invention. And it was for breaking the iron forest laws of that tyranny, that Graham had been forced ten years ago to flee.

"As if it were worth hanging a man, for killing the Duke's deer!" he thought bitterly.

Graham topped a slight crest, and from the northern heights looked down across the island at the lights of New York.

IT occupied the site that New York occupied in that other time-branch Earth, but was nothing like that city. This was a medieval-looking town of huddled stone streets and walls and gables, dominated by

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the massive castle of Duke Clarence, Governor General of Farther England.

From the walled town down there at the tip of the island, farming commons stretched northward. Then these gave way to dark forest in whose edge Graham stood.

He went eagerly now, along the edge of the forest, until he saw the giant limbs of the great maple.

It looked the same. It looked just the same as when he and Edith had been sweethearts, meeting here secretly. She would come up from the town and wait here for him, a slim, black-cloaked figure—

As she was waiting, now!

Graham realized, as soon as he saw her, that he had never really doubted that she would answer his secret message, and be here.

Ten years of pain and hardship dropped from his mind like a cast-off garment as he went forward and took her in his arms.

"Edith! Edith!"

Her face was pale, her dark eyes brimming with tears, as she looked up at him.

"You should not have come back! It's too dangerous! You're still a proscribed outlaw, and—"

"She's right, Graham—you should not have come back!"

That rasping voice from the dark behind them spun Graham around, his sword leaping from its sheath.

He knew instantly the bulky figure in chain-mail that stepped from the shadow of a big pine. It was the man who had pursued him ten year before—Francis Quarl, the Duke's chief bloohound.

Quarl's massive face had a grim smile of satisfaction on it. And as Graham saw the shadowy men-at-arms closing in from every tree, he knew with chill certainty that this would be no escape.

Graham raised his sword. He said tightly, "I suppose it was the wench I sent the note by?"

Quarl nodded complacently. "She scented reward and brought it to me first. The Duke will be glad. He likes to make an example of outlaws."

Edith uttered a sobbing scream, and Graham pushed her violently out of the way as the men-at-arms came with a rush.

He backed against the giant maple and stood against it as his blade hammered the other swords darting at him.

He got in three quick, savage thrusts. The first two sent a wizened guardsman to his knees clutching his belly, and the third slashed an awkward youngster's neck.

"Stand clear!" shouted Quarl's bull voice, and Graham glimpsed the man coolly aiming a clumsy, tubular object at him.

He instantly recognized it as one of the new gunpowder firearms, cumbersome flintlock things that he had heard were being used more and more these days.

It roared flame, and a heavy slug smashed into Graham's upper right arm.

He tried to fumble his sword into his left hand, but that was hopeless. They smothered him.

He heard Edith shriek as a guardsman pulled his head back by the hair, and drew his dagger.

"Not here, you fools!" roared Quarl. "The Duke will want him to hang properly!"

Graham was efficiently and cruelly bound, and marched away. Looking back, he glimpsed Edith a huddled, sobbing heap on the ground.

Stunned as he was by his capture and what it meant, he was aware of one poignant stab of disappointment. He had not even seen his children. Edith had not dared bring them, and now he would never see them—

New York looked the same to Graham as they pushed him through its narrow, cobbled streets. The same ill-lit darkness, the same portentously overhanging houses, the same foul kennels.

He could remember when he had thought the Duke's castle here the mightiest structure in the world. He could remember peering with boyish awe at the dark stairway that led down to the dungeons, the stairway down which they were taking him now.

HE sat in the cold stone cell, when they left him there, nursing his throbbing arm. He sat thinking and remembering, for he knew how little time he had left for thought and memory.

The door opened and a priest came in. Graham recognized him as his studious, timid playmate Eric, of the years before.

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"Captain Quarl sent me down to you, Graham," said Eric uncertainly. "To help you make your peace, before—"

He stopped, and Graham nodded. "So they're hanging me quickly? I might have known."

Suddenly rage swept over him like a flood of molten lava.

"Hanging me, and for what? For a couple of deer killed ten years ago! Is there sense or justice in that?"

"No, there isn't," Eric said heavily. "But that is the kind of world we live in."

"Then I wish to God it had been a different world!" raged Graham.

Eric said wistfully, "It *could* have been a different world, if things had happened differently. This feudalism, this tyranny that has smothered progress, would have been swept away long since if Roger Bacon's vision had come true.

"He was a dreamer, centuries ago, who prophesied that some day man's wisdom, his science, would grow so great that man would master nature, harness the lightning and fly through the air, make machines to do his toil. He believed it would happen so —but it didn't."

Graham looked at him haggardly. "To think what the Earth might have been, if his phophecy had come true! To think that men, if they'd only mastered science, could have lived without pain and fear!"

Then his shoulders sagged. "There might have been a world like that. But—we have to live in the world we have."

They sat silently together until dawn light filtered through the bars, and they heard the rough tramp of approaching feet.

Graham, his hands bound behind him and his shattered arm a fiery agony, walked silently up into the castle courtyard where Quarl and his hangman waited placidly by the Duke's scaffold.

A little crowd of half-curious, half-sympathetic citizens had gathered to watch the Duke's justice. Then Graham heard his name called, and knew Edith's voice.

He saw her, face deathly pale, down there in the crowd. There was a tall, scared-looking boy of fourteen beside her, and a boy and girl a few years younger, clinging to her other side.

He knew, then. He knew that Edith had come to give him this last glimpse of his children before he died.

Graham felt a stiffness in his throat as he looked down at them. He heard Quarl's voice giving orders, as though from a remote distance. He barely felt the noose slipping around his neck.

He looked down at his children, and smiled. They would see their father die like a man. It was all that he could give them, now.

He heard Quarl give another order, and—

Click!

III

OUT of the darkness into which he had been suddenly hurled, Graham came slowly to awareness.

For a moment he was utterly bewildered. Then he realized that the projector had automatically functioned as he had planned, to hurl his mind on to another time-branch, another might-have-been Earth.

And he was now in another might-have-been Graham's brain, perceiving with his senses! Only this other self of his was not named Graham.

Grahm was his name, and he was Chief Astronomer in the Temple of the Stars of the great city of New Mayapan, in this fateful year that corresponded to the 1948 of the other time-branch.

He saw with Grahm's eyes, shared Grahm's memories. He stood in a small, round stone room elaborately graven with strange glyphs, and with slits in its vaulted roof. Beneath one of those slits, a copper cradle held a curved mirror which imaged a bright star.

Grahm was intently focusing the image of the star in the mirror, delicately shifting it in the copper cradle whose movable arc had a calibrated scale upon its edge.

"A half-year's waiting!" he murmured tensely, as he worked. "And tonight I shall learn if what I dreamed is true!"

Graham knew, from the other's brain, what Grahm was trying to do. He had dreamed that the stars were infinitely far away, and he was trying to prove it by triangulation.

Then, into this little observatory atop the

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temple, came a woman and a man. He knew, as questionlessly, that these were Grahm's wife, Ehda, and his friend, Itzil.

The woman was dark, lovely, but with dread widening her eyes. Both she and the man wore, like Grahm himself, the short white linen tunic and brilliant feathers of rank worn by all upper-class Mayans.

"Grahm, we cannot stay longer!" the woman exclaimed. "Already the city is almost deserted!"

The man supported her appeal. "The Aztec troops are already burning the villages across the river! Come and see for yourself!"

He pulled Grahm out of the room, onto the little balcony that encircled this high observatory tower.

They looked down in the darkness at the great city of New Mayapan. Its mighty, terraced pyramids rose like black bulks into the night, but there were few lights in its streets and gardens for the shadow of doom was upon it.

The city rose upon the island, where, in Graham's other Earth, the city New York had risen. And as he looked through Grahm's eyes, he knew with Grahm's knowledge all the centuries of *different* history that had led this place up to the greatness that was now about to fall.

For in this other Earth, history had been far different from that of his own Earth, and the feudalistic Earth from which he had just come. In this time-branch, the Old World had developed no high civilization at all, and so had never conquered this New World.

Instead, the ancient Mayan civilization here had risen unchecked to preeminent magnificence and splendor. From its far southern homeland, the great Mayan Empire had spread northward to embrace most of the eastern part of this continent. Here in New Mayapan, its greatest city, Mayan splendor and science had reached their apogee.

Ehda was pointing westward across the dark river. "See the fires of the villages!"

Grahm saw them, red and ugly scars upon the face of the night.

"The Aztecs have boats and will be across and pouring into New Mayapan, in a few hours!" Itzil said urgently. "We must leave!"

"A few hours?" Grahm muttered. "But that would be enough time for me to complete my experiment."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Itzil. "You know what it means if you stay here until they come!"

Graham knew. Everyone knew what it was like to live under the heel of the conquering Aztecs.

He felt the sick despair that had haunted every Mayan heart for months. The great Mayan Empire that had been the glory of the world was about to perish.

Always, it had been menaced by the slow growth of the Aztec Kingdom of the far west—those power-lusting, war-worshipping barbarians who scorned the arts and sciences of the Mayans and who had built up an autocratic military state.

But not until the Aztecs has developed such new weapons as the cross-bow and catapult, had they attacked the Empire. They had done so with such swift, concentrated, hellish efficiency that already most of the Empire was overrun.

"All the great old cities already conquered," Ehda was saying chokedly. "Uxmal, Old Mayapan, Palenque—even ancient and sacred Cichen Itza. And now the last and greatest, New Mayapan—"

"It is the end of civilization," Grahm said heavily. "In the New World there will be only the Aztec barbarism, just as the Old World has always lain wrapped in barbarism."

He shook his head sadly. "A ruined world, a world of fear and darkness. And it might have been so different! If only the Old World races had developed civilization too, they would have helped us now! They would have lived in peaceful friendship with our Mayan civilization, in a peaceful, happy world."

"It's no time to think of might-have-beens!" Itzil expostulated. "The Empire is dying, but we can still avoid life under the conquerors, if we flee now!"

Grahm turned and looked back into his little observatory, and then shook his head.

"I *can't* go now! I'm on the very verge of the greatest discovery of all—the secret of the nature of the stars and universe!"

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"What good will such a discovery do now when barbarism is claiming the world?" Itzil cried. "Why should you sacrifice yours and Ehda's freedom for it?"

Grahm put his hand on his wife's trembling shoulder. "Ehda, you must go with Itzil. I'll come soon and will overtake you."

She began wildly to protest, but he spoke peremptorily.

"It is my command! Take her, Itzil—quickly!"

When they had gone, Grahm gave another quick look toward the west. The fires there were nearly to the river edge.

"Little time," he muttered. "But maybe there's enough."

He hastened back into his little observatory, and bent again over the copper cradle of his reflecting telescope.

As he carefully set the instrument and checked its reading again and yet again, all else faded from his mind.

"The angle *is* different!" he told himself, his blood leaping with excitement. "Now the calculations!"

He had, half a year before, taken an angular measurement on the great green star of the north. Now, when the Earth was on the other side of the Sun, he had taken that measurement again, and the angle was slightly different.

GRAHM bent with his reed pen over sheets of paper, by the light of a small lamp. His brain raced over the calculations, yet he was checking each of them with utmost care.

An hour passed, and another. A faint scent of smoke drifted into the little room, and with it came a distant echo of triumphant, wolfish shouting.

Grahm laid down his pen, and as he rose to his feet he found himself trembling with exultation.

"It is true! That star is unthinkable leagues away in space. And that means that it is a sun, a sun like our own Sun but so far away that it is tiny to the eye!"

He strode out onto the balcony. His eyes ignored the dark, ominous craft sweeping across the blood-red, firelit river. They lifted instead to the solemn sky of stars.

An awe fell upon him. "Every one of those points of light—a mighty Sun! I, first of all men, have looked at the true face of the universe!"

And then from his rapturous heights of exultation, he fell into black despair.

"And the knowledge will perish with me, or survive only as a distorted legend! What good to learn truth now, on the very eve of the long night of barbarism that is coming?"

The Aztec troops were streaming into the city below him, torchlight shaking from the conquest-mad, victorious soldiery. Grahm knew, as he had known from the first, that there was no chance to flee now.

Then a hand touched his arm, and he turned quickly. It was Ehda, her face a strained white blur in the dimness.

"I would not go with Itzil, Grahm! I came back!"

"Ehda, you should not have!" he cried. "We can't get away now. You know what it will be like to live under the Aztecs."

"I know," she said. "But whatever comes, I will share it with you."

Grahm put his arm around her and held her close to him.

Down in the great city below them, flames were bursting redly as the fanatic Aztecs began firing the temples.

"So ends the Empire," whispered Grahm. So ends our world."

Again, for a moment, the blind, futile longing shook his mind, the longing for that world that might-have-been.

"It would have been a world of glory, if the Old World had developed like the New," he whispered. "A world of glory, such as we shall never know."

Then he tightened his arm comfortingly closer still around the trembling woman.

"Whatever is to come, we will face it."

The Aztec troops down there were already at the base of the Temple of the Stars, were—

Click!

IV

THIS time when he emerged from darkness, Graham realized at once that again the projector had hurled his mind on to still another time-branch, another Earth and another's man's body.

He knew even before he saw with his

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new self's eyes that this time his name was Gra, and that he was a slave of the Scaled Ones.

He crouched with a dozen other men and women who were clad like himself in silken loin-cloths, in a room that looked exotically strange. The room had shimmering, curving walls of pale plastic. It was illuminated by a glowing plate in the ceiling, and had no windows.

He knew, from the knowledge of his new self Gra, that this was a room in the slave quarters of the New City of their masters, the Scaled Ones. And he knew too that they, few men and women, were conspiring here against their masters.

"We *can* escape, if you will but follow my plan!" Gra was saying. "Once in the cold lands of the north we would be safe, and free!"

Ea, his mate, looked at him anxiously. "But Gra, if we fail, the penalty—"

"Would death be worse than forever serving the Scaled Ones?" flashed Gra.

Old Thur shook his gray head. "Even if we escaped to the northern lands, the Scaled Ones would sooner or later find us."

"They hate cold, and would not search long," Gra declared. "We could keep hidden, could grow in numbers, could try to devise weapons like theirs."

He added, "We, or our descendants, could some day then overturn the Scaled Ones and make *man* the master of the Earth!"

There was an astonishment and horror on their faces, as though he had spoken blasphemy.

"But only the Scaled Ones can be masters—they have *always* been masters!" protested one of the men.

It was so, Graham knew from the knowledge in Gra's brain. In this time-branch, this might-have-been Earth, the history of millions of years was different.

Man had never risen to supremacy, in this Earth. Instead that supremacy had been retained by the reptile species. The great reptilian clans who in his own Earth had perished from climatic change and given way to the mammals, had in this time-branch *not* perished but had survived and developed an intelligent race.

That race, the bipedal Scaled Ones, had risen to civilization through the ages. This New City, that occupied the island where in another time-branch New York stood, was but one of their many metropoli. They were the masters—and the humans who had developed ages later were merely their slaves.

"But it was only accident that it happened so," Gra asserted. "I overheard their great scientist, S'See, lecturing in their university here to the Scaled Ones.

"He said that if one reptile species had not chanced to develop enough intelligence to survive the climatic change, all the great reptiles would have perished and man would have inherited the Earth."

They stared at him, and then Ea voiced the incredulous wonder they all felt.

"A world in which humans ruled? It sounds impossible."

"Yet it might have been," Gra insisted. His tone grew wistful, dreaming. "If Earth had only been like that! Men would then have ruled the world in peace and happiness and wisdom.

"We can't have a world like that, but we *can* at least try to become free!" Gra went on. "And I've chosen you for this attempt because I felt that you, of all our people, most desired to be free."

He stood up. "The time is now, when the Birth Festival holds almost all the Scaled Ones in the great hall. Ea and I are going. You others may come with us, or remain."

A moment's hesitation, and then old Thur too stood up. "I speak for the others, I know. We will go."

Gra drew from its hiding-place the bundle that contained all his secret preparations, and went to the door. "Then come!"

Gra's brain was a riot of mingled excitement, hope and dread as he led his little band down the pale, plastic corridor that was one of the many labyrinthine ways of New City.

Even to be out of their quarters without authorization was an almost unheard-of infraction of the law, for humans. Yet on that very fact, he counted for the success of his attempt.

The familiar ways that he had known all his life, the warm, steamy passages and halls and ramps of the mighty reptile-city, were deserted as the group of humans crept through them tonight.

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Eery and solemn, the strange strains of alien music drifted to them through the labyrinth from ahead.

"The music of the Birth Festival," whispered Ea, trembling.

"We must go the great hall, to win to the western water-gate where the boats are moored," Gra said. "It is the only way."

"But the guards at the water-gate, and the locks?" questioned another, fearfully.

"I have a plan," Gra repeated. "But hurry!"

The music swelled louder, and presently they crouched lower as they passed along a railed balcony high above the great hall.

THE great hall of New City was great, indeed—a colossal oval chamber whose green, shining walls bore huge, rearing figures of the giant reptiles of long ago who had been the Scaled Ones' ancestors.

Almost all the thousands of the Scaled Ones in the city were gathered down there on the floor of the hall, in silent rows. They stood solemnly, erect figures vaguely manlike in size and shape, their harnesses of woven metal glittering with jewels, every unwinking eye in those flat reptilian faces turned toward the far end of the hall.

Up there on the dais, the annual Birth Festival was reaching its climax. The hundreds of eggs that had been brought from the incubators for this solemn rite were cracking open as the music rose triumphant. The new young of the Scaled Ones, coming forth to life!

"To look upon this rite is death for any human!" Ea murmured, quaking.

"Do not linger! On, before the Festival ends!" Gra urged, in a whisper.

They left the great hall behind them, hurried through more deserted corridors and over high-flung bridges between buildings that gave view of all New City gleaming in strange splendor of curved roof and wall and minaret beneath the rising moon.

Then they went down a winding ramp into the cool open air, down to the stone dock along which the flat, long metal power-boats of the Scaled Ones were moored.

A high metal grating lay between them and the dock. And on their side of its locked gate, two Scaled Ones stood negligent guard.

Gra saw the fire-tubes those two guards wore at their belts. They could blast him in a moment. He was risking all on the fact that they would not dream of any human slave defying law.

He handed the bundle to Thur and walked right out into the moonlight toward the guards. He saw the Scaled Ones' unwinking eyes turn instantly toward him, and those behind him.

"Whose order bring you here at this hour, humans?" demanded one of the guards in his toneless, hissing voice.

Gra answered, "The orders of Zharra, our master. He sent us to tell you that—"

He had been walking forward as he spoke. And abruptly, he sprang at the nearest guard.

Sheer incredulity that a human should attack him made the Scaled One slow in drawing his weapon. He uttered a hissing cry.

BUT Gra had whipped from inside his loin-cloth the jewelled dagger that he had stolen weeks before. The point ripped the Scaled One's breathing-pouch and he fell, gasping and choking.

The other men had the second guard down and frantically squirming. Gra ran in and plunged the dagger again and again into the reptilian heart.

"Now the gate! How do we get through it?" cried old Thur.

"Stand back!" Gra exclaimed. He had grasped the golden fire-tube of the first fallen guard.

He pointed it at the locked gate and thumbed its catch. The tube detonated and a thundering streak of fire blasted the gate-lock.

But as they ran out onto the dock, lights were flashing across the towers of New City, and thrumming alarm-devices were sounding.

"Unchain a boat for us, Thur!" cried Gra. "Into it, you others!"

Himself, he ran along the dock, and the tube in his hand thundered fire at the stern of each moored metal boat. The crashing fire-streaks fused one power-unit after another.

He raced back as Thur started the power-unit of the remaining craft. And as Gra

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leaped in with the others, the power-tubes started to flash back fire beneath the water.

"They come!" cried Ea.

Scaled Ones were pouring out of the ramp toward the dock, as the flat metal craft shot out onto the moonlit sea.

Staccato thunder barked as fire-tubes sent streaks of flame after them. The water boiled and bubbled, behind them.

"We're out of range!" Gra cried exultantly. "Straight out to sea, Thur!"

The brooding, gleaming mass of New City dropped behind them and then soon their little craft was out of the narrow entrance of the bay, tossing upon the great waves of the open ocean.

"Now, head northward!" Gra ordered. "Toward the cold lands!"

Dawn found them out of sight of land. There was no pursuit in sight behind them. But the power-unit was dead.

"We'll soon be safe," Gra proclaimed. "They hate the cold of the north so badly that they'll not follow far."

He pointed at the bundle. "In it is a sail, and enough synthefood for many days. We can reach the cold lands."

The others looked silently and fearfully at the great gray ocean around them.

"We too shall die in those cold lands, sooner or later," murmured one.

And another added, "At least, in the New City we did not suffer the hardship we shall suffer now."

Gra's voice rang harsh. "We shall suffer, but now at least we have a chance to be free and to start building a new world for our race. And we, or others like us, will succeed some day.

"We cannot have the beautiful, glorious world that might-have-been if the reptiles had perished and man had inherited Earth. But we *can* be free!"

Old Thur nodded wisely. "Our world will be one of hardship and pain, yes. But I think that *any* world must be thus. For there can be no life without both pain and joy, since pain and joy themselves are part of life."

The courage came back into their doubting faces. The jointed mast was shipped, the little silk sail bellied in the wind.

Gra sat with Ea's hand in his, looking ahead into the gray vagueness.

"Ea, some day men will come back from the north! Some day, they—"

Click!

V

GRAHAM, for the fourth time, felt his mind hurled through bellowing darkness to a sudden shock and silence.

He opened his eyes. He was looking into the round, pale quartz lens of his projector.

He looked around almost incredulously at the familiar, electric-lit interior of his New York laboratory.

"I'm back!" he whispered.

The projector's automatic switch had again functioned, cutting the thrust-ray, and his mind had drawn back from those other Earths of the other time-branches, to his own time-branch and Earth.

Graham sat, his thoughts whirling as he remembered those three might-have-been worlds in each of which, for a few hours, he had lived.

"And the other Grahams, in those other worlds, they too were dreaming of might-have-beens!"

The tragic irony of it! Of that other Graham of the feudal world, wishing that Earth might have been a world of science because then all men would have been happy!

Of Grahm of New Mayapan, dreaming of the happy world that might-have-been if the Old World had been civilized, and never suspecting that that would have doomed his own civilization ages earlier.

Of Gra, the slave, wistfully wishing that humans might have been the masters because then there would have been nothing but peace and happiness and wisdom.

All three of them, those other Grahams, wishing for might-have-beens without knowing that their realization would have been a tragic disappointment.

"Just as *my* might-have been worlds proved to be, when I entered them," Graham thought sickly.

Was this a cosmic jest of the universe against man, that on all the countless time-branch worlds he should dream of might-have-been worlds that were really as forbidding as his own?

Graham went to the window and raised

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the shade, and looked out on the towers of New York rising stark and gray into the dawn.

HE KNEW now that there was no escape for him into the worlds of might-have-been. He was trapped, a prisoner, in this unhappy world into which he had been born.

"But we have to live in the world we have."

It was as though a faint, phantom voice had spoken in his memory.

Graham—the other Graham—had said that before he went to the scaffold, to die smiling so that his children might remember him so.

That other Graham, and Grahm, and the slave Gra—they too had dreamed wistfully of might-have-been, yes. But they had none the less faced their own darker worlds with courage.

"No life without both pain and joy, since pain and joy themselves are life!"

Graham, staring from his window at the dawn-lit towers of New York, saw that now as truest truth.

A stone felt no unhappiness, and no happiness. But every living thing did—it bartered endurance of agony for its golden moments of joy. And the higher in the scale of life it climbed, the greater its suffering and its ecstasy. So that for a living creature to complain because he suffered, was in reality to complain because he lived.

Graham felt new courage straighten his shoulders. He whispered, to those other selves of his who could not hear.

"Graham—Grahm—Gra—you taught me something. I won't forget!"

In the might-have-been, he had not found the happiness he sought. But he had found there the truth that was peace.

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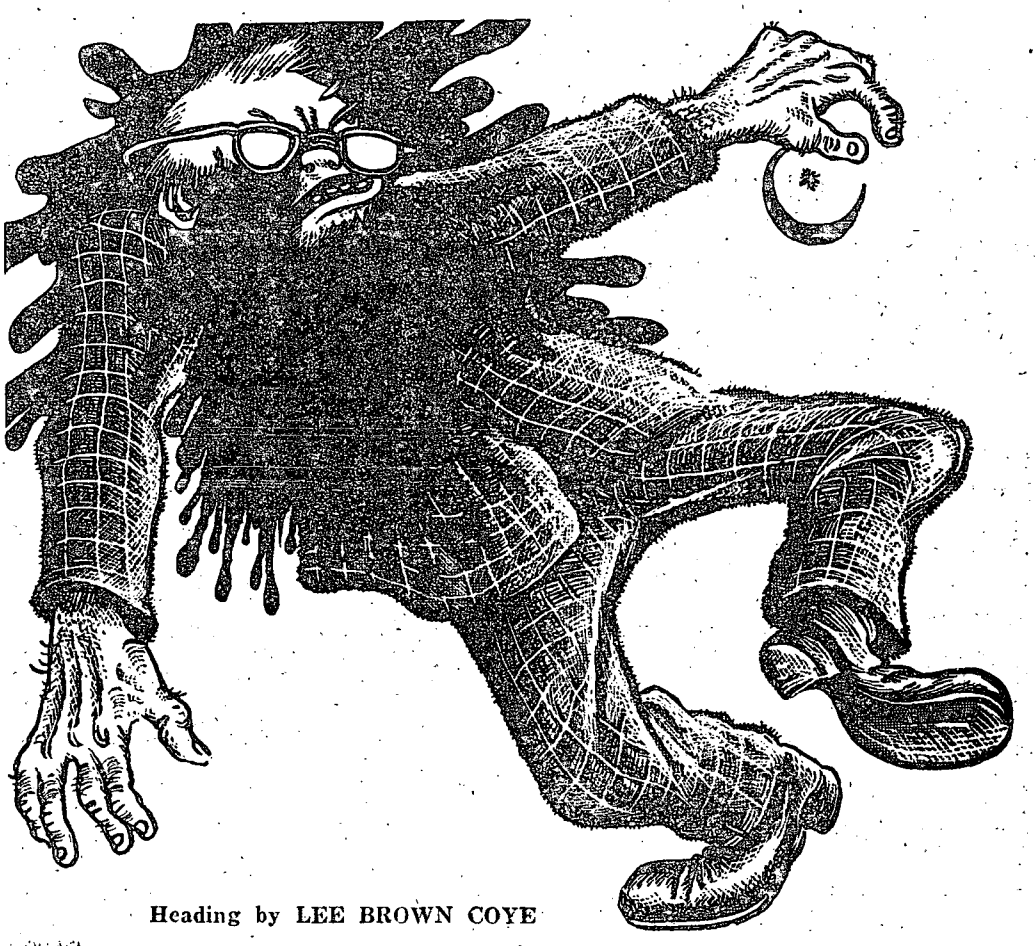
Ghost Hunt

BY H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

WELL, listeners, this is Tony Weldon speaking. Here we are on the third of our series of Ghost Hunts. Let's hope it will be more successful then the other two. All our preparations have been made, and now it is up to the spooks. My colleague tonight is Professor Mignon of Paris. He is the most celebrated investigator of psychic phenomena in the world, and I am very proud to be his collaborator.

We are in a medium size, three-story Georgian house not far from London. We have chosen it for this reason. It has a truly terrible history. Since it was built, there are records of no less than thirty suicides in or from it, and there may well have been more. There have been eight since 1893. Its builder and first occupant was a prosperous city merchant, and a very bad hat, it appears; glutton, wine-bibber and other undesirable things, including a very bad husband. His wife stood his cruelties and in-

The house was "bad" since the day it'd been built . . . and no wonder



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fidelities as long as she could and then hanged herself in the powder closet belonging to the biggest bedroom on the second floor, so initiating a terrible sequence.

I used the expression "suicides in and from it," because while some have shot themselves and some hanged themselves, no less than nine have done a very strange thing. They have risen from their beds during the night and flung themselves to death in the river which runs past the bottom of the garden some hundred yards away. The last one was actually seen to do so at dawn on an autumn morning. He was seen running headlong and heard to be shouting as though to companions running by his side. The owner tells me people simply will not live in the house and the agents will no longer keep it on their books. He will not live in it himself, for very good reasons, he declares. He will not tell us what those reasons are; he wishes us to have an absolutely open mind on the subject, as it were. And he declares that if the Professor's verdict is unfavorable, he will pull down the house and rebuild it. One can understand that, for it almost seems to merit the label "Death-Trap."

Well, that is sufficient introduction. I think I have convinced you it certainly merits investigation, but we cannot guarantee to deliver the goods or the ghosts, which have an awkward habit of taking a night off on these occasions.

And now to business. Imagine me seated at a fine satinwood table, not quite in the middle of a big reception room on the ground floor. The rest of the furniture is shrouded in white, protective covers. The walls are light oak panels. The electric light in the house has been switched off; so all the illumination I have is a not very powerful electric lamp. I shall remain here with a mike, while the Professor roams the house in search of what he may find. He will not have a mike as it distracts him, and he has a habit, so he says, of talking to himself while conducting these investigations. He will return to me as soon as he has anything to report. Is that all clear? Well, then, here is the Professor to say a few words to you before he sets forth on his tour of discovery. I may say he speaks English far better than I do. Professor Mignon.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, this is Professor Mignon. This house is without doubt, how shall I say, impregnated with evil. It affects one profoundly. It is bad, bad, bad! It is soaked in evil and reeking with emanations from its wicked past. It must be pulled down, I assure you. I do not think it affects my friend, Mr. Weldo, in the same way, but he is not psychic, not mediumistic as I am. Now shall we see ghosts, spirits? Ah, that I cannot say! But they are here and they are evil; that is sure. I can feel their presence. There is, maybe, danger. I shall soon know. And now I shall start off with just one electric torch to show me the way. Presently I will come back and tell you what I have seen, or if not seen, felt and perhaps suffered. But remember, we can summon spirits from the vasty deep, but will they come when we call for them? We shall see.

WELL, listeners, I'm sure if anyone can, it's the Professor. You must have found those few words far more impressive than anything I said. That was an expert speaking on what he knows. Personally, alone here in this big, silent room, they didn't have a very reassuring effect on me. In fact, he wasn't quite correct when he said this place didn't affect me at all. I don't find it a cheerful spot by any means. You can be sure of that. I may not be psychic, but I've certainly got a sort of feeling it doesn't want us here, resents us, and would like to see the back of us. *Or else!* I felt that way as soon as I entered the front door. One sort of had to wade through the hostility. I'm not kidding or trying to raise your hopes.

It's very quiet here, listeners. I'm having a look around the room. This lamp casts some queer shadows. There is an odd one near the wall by the door, but I realize now it must be a reflection from a big Adams bookcase. I know that's what it is because I peeped under the dust-cover when I first came in. It's a very fine piece. It's queer to think of you all listening to me. I shouldn't really mind if I had some of you for company. The owner of the house told us we should probably hear rats and mice in the wainscoting. Well I can certainly hear those now. Pretty hefty rats from the sound

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of them. Even you can almost hear them, I should think.

Well, what else is there to tell you about? Nothing very much, except that there's a bat in the room. I think it must be a bat and not a bird. I haven't actually seen it, only its shadow as it flew past the wall just now, and then it fanned past my face. I don't know much about bats, but I thought they went to bed in the winter. This one must suffer from insomnia. Ah, there it is again. It actually touched me as it passed. Now I can hear the Professor moving about in the room above. I don't suppose you can; have a try. Now listen carefully.

Hello! Did you hear that! He must have knocked over a chair or something—a heavy chair from the sound of it. I wonder if he's having any luck. Ah, there's that bat again. It seems to like me. Each time it just touches my face with its wing as it passes. They're smelly things, bats. I don't think they wash themselves often enough. This one smells kind of rotten. I wonder what the Professor knocked over, because I can see a small stain forming on the ceiling. Perhaps a flower bowl or something. Hello! Did you hear that sharp crack? I think you must have. The oak-paneling stretching, I suppose, but it was almost ear-splitting in here. Something ran across my foot, then, a rat perhaps. I've always loathed rats. Most people do, of course. That stain on the ceiling has grown quite a lot. I think I'll just go to the door and shout to the Professor to make sure he's all right. You'll hear me shout and his answer, I expect.

Professor! Professor!

Well, he didn't answer. I believe he's a little bit deaf. But he's sure to be all right. I won't try again just yet as I know he likes being undisturbed on these occasions. I'll sit down again for a minute or two. I'm afraid this is rather dull for you, listeners. I'm not finding it so, but then of course—there, I heard him cough. Did you hear that cough, listeners, a sort of very throaty double cough? It seemed to come from—I wonder if he's crept down and is having a little fun with me, because, I tell you, listeners, this place is beginning to get on my nerves just a wee little bit, just a bit. I wouldn't live in it for a pension, a very large pension. Get away, you brute! That bat! Faugh! It stinks.

Now listen carefully.

CAN you hear those rats? Having a game of rugger from the sound of them. I wonder if you could hear them. I really shall be quite glad to get out of here. I can quite imagine people doing themselves in in this house. Saying to themselves: after all, it isn't much of a life when you think of it; figure it out, is it? Just work and worry and getting old and seeing your friends die. Let's end it all in the river!

I'm not being very cheerful, am I? It's this darned house. Those other two places we investigated didn't worry me a bit, but this—I wonder what the Professor's doing besides coughing. I can't quite make that cough out because—get away, you brute! That bat'll be the death of me! Death of me! Death of me!

I'm glad I've got you to talk to, listeners, but I wish you could answer back. I'm beginning to dislike the sound of my own voice. After a time, if you've been talking in a room alone, you get fanciful. Have you ever noticed that? You sort of think you can hear someone talking back.

There!

No, of course you couldn't have heard it, because it wasn't there, of course. Just in my head. Just subjective, that's the word. That's the word. Very odd. That *was* me laughing, of course. I'm saying "Of course" a lot. Of course I am. Well, listeners, I'm afraid this is awfully dull for you. Not for me, though, not for me! No ghosts so far, unless the Professor is having better luck.

There! You must have heard that! What a crack that paneling makes! Well, you must have heard that, listeners, better than nothing. Ha! Ha! Professor! Professor! Phew, what an echo!

Now listeners, I'm going to stop talking for a moment. I don't suppose you'll mind. Let's see if we can hear anything. . . .

DID you hear it? I'm not exactly sure what it was. Not sure. I wonder if you heard it. Not exactly, but the house shook a little and the windows rattled. I don't think we'll do that again I'll go

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on talking. I wonder how long one could endure the atmosphere of this place. It certainly is inclined to get one down.

Gosh, that stain has grown The one on the ceiling. It's actually starting to drip. I mean form bubbles. They'll start dropping soon. Colored bubbles, apparently. I wonder if the Professor is okay? I mean he might have shut himself in a powder-closet or something and the powder closets in this house aren't particularly—well you never know, do you? Now I should have said that shadow had moved. No, I suppose I put the lamp down in a slightly different position. Shadows do make odd patterns, you must have noticed that. This one might be a body lying on its face with its arms stretched out. Cheerful, aren't I! An aunt of mine gassed herself, as a matter of fact. Well, I don't know why I told you that. Not quite in the script.

Professor! Professor!

Where is that darned old fuzzy-whiskers! I shall certainly advise the owner to have this place pulled down. Emphatically. Then where'll *you* go! I must go upstairs in a minute or two and see what's happened to the Professor. Well, I was telling you about Auntie . . .

D'you know, listeners, I really believe I'd go completely crackers if I stayed here much longer. More or less anyway, and quite soon, quite soon, quite soon. Absolutely stark, staring! It wears you down. That's exactly it, it wears you down. I can quite understand, well, I don't say all that again. I'm afraid this is all awfully dull for you, listeners. I should switch off if I were you.

I should! What's on the other program? I mean it, switch off! There, what did I tell you; that stain's started to drip drops, drip drops, drip drops, drip drops! I'll go and catch one on my hand . . .

Good God!

Professor! Professor! Professor! Now then up them stairs! Now which room would it be? Left or right? Left, right, left, right —left has it. In we go.

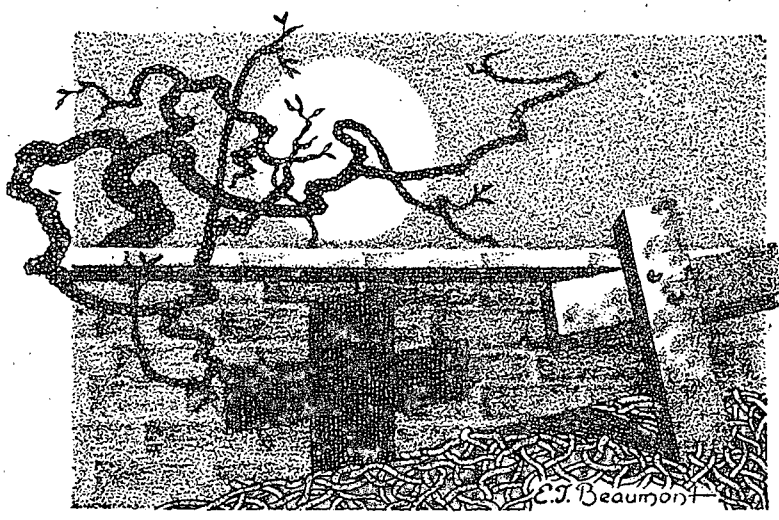
Well, gentlemen, good evening! What have you done with the Professor? I know he's dead. See his blood on my hand? What have you done with him? Make way, please, gentlemen. What have you done with him? D'you want me to sing it, Tra-la-la.

Switch off, you fools!

Well, if this isn't too darned funny. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Hear me laughing, listeners.

Switch off, you fools

That can't be him lying there. He hadn't a *red* beard! Don't crowd round me, gentlemen! Don't crowd me, I tell you! What d'you want me to do? You want me to go to the river, don't you? Ha! Ha! Now? Will you come with me? Come on, then! To the river! To the river!



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The Leonardo Rondache

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

BETWEEN Prendic Norbier and John Thunstone were not many physical differences. They were both inches over six feet, they were both broad even in proportion to such height, they were both dark-haired and strong-featured. Each had huge, long hands such as one associates with statues, each was perforce dressed in specially tailored clothing and specially cobbled shoes. And just now, in Norbier's little study-shack behind his country house, they sat on opposite sides of the table beneath the bright ceiling light in attitudes of eager interest almost exactly alike.

Differences were the great differences one sees at a second glance. That second glance, if a thoughtful one, would define John Thunstone's weight as hard, active weight and Norbier's as relaxed, good-humored weight. The tan on Thunstone's broad

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

. . . . a deep, dead silence and strange light that grew less and less . . .

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brow and lined jowl was somehow the tan of open-air activity, and that on Norbier's recognizable as fashionable tan, the product of lounging on beaches or dozing under sun lamps. And the expression in Thunstone's eyes was of intent, almost apprehensive study, while Norbier looked on in confident anticipation.

Dwarfed in Thunstone's great fingers was a magnifying glass. He narrowed his eye to peer through it at the photograph on the table. Finally he laid the glass down and looked at Norbier.

"It's a da Vinci signature," he announced gravely. "The reversed writing and the distinctive letter-forms—of course, those in themselves could be trickery, even clumsy trickery. But the glass shows that the lines are real writing, not a forger's painstakingly drawn replica. It's da Vinci, though with more of youth in it than any I remember seeing. Of course, there are other experts, better qualified than I—"

"You're one of several that says Leonardo da Vinci wrote the signature I photographed," said Norbier. "Thank you, Thunstone." He took the photographed writing back. "Now as to your pay—"

"For my pay," said Thunstone, "show me the original."

Norbier smiled. His smile was not like Thunstone's, it was a trifle crooked and suspicious. "Well," he said, "I've thought and even worried about showing the original. But you, Thunstone, study other things than handwriting and Renaissance art. Your specific studies might make it all right for you to have a look. Those studies of yours—and the honest wish I feel to make a friend of you."

"My only other serious study," reminded Thunstone, "is black magic and how to nullify it."

"Exactly," nodded Norbier. "You'll see how it fits in. Step this way."

They rose and Norbier led the way across the floor to a wide narrow table that stood against a wall. Something stood there, like a big round mirror, covered with a white cloth. "Here it is," announced Norbier, and pulled the cloth away.

What Thunstone said would have been a curse, but for the tone that made it a prayer. He gazed at the round disk of wood, old and heavy and as big around as a tea tray. For a moment it was no disk, nor was it wood. In the brilliant light of the ceiling lamp he had a sense of attentive menace, glaring and scrambling. Then he made himself realize that he was looking at something painted, and painted long ago at that—the colors dimmed, the detail faded. Thunstone's mouth looked thin for a moment, but he kept himself steady.

"There's the signature I photographed, dashed in with black pigment just below the picture," Norbier was telling him. "And you probably realize just what one of Leonardo's lost masterpieces this is."

THUNSTONE gazed at Norbier. "I know what story of his life it immediately tells," he agreed. "A story some say is a legend, and others—Mrs. Rachel Annand Taylor for one—feel sure it is true. Leonardo was a boy in the home of his father, the notary Piero da Vinci. A peasant brought a round of wood—a *rondache,* such as foot-soldiers of that day used for shields—asking that a decoration be painted upon it—"

"Exactly, exactly," Norbier almost crowed. "And Leonardo was always interested in monsters. He shut himself away and studied all kinds of unpleasant little things—lizards, spiders, bats—and borrowed from all, blending and flavoring them with his own genius. What he managed," and Norbier seemed not too anxious to look at the picture, "was sufficient to startle his father; then the elder da Vinci's business sense asserted itself. He gave the peasant another *rondache,* nicely painted with an arrow-pierced heart. He sold the weird masterpiece of his son, at a thumping price; enough, perhaps, to pay Leonardo's first tuition fees in the studio of Verrochio in Florence."

"And this may be the *rondache* in question." Thunstone studied it again. "You understand Piero da Vinci's first reaction to it, don't you? May I ask where it came to modern attention, and how you got it?"

"In Germany," said Norbier. "I had a little hand, as no doubt you've heard, in studying and identifying the hodge-podge of art treasures stolen by the Nazi bigwigs and stored away in vaults. This turned up in a neat little trove locked up in a cellar

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owned by one Herr Gaierstein. Know him?"

"Gaierstein," echoed Thunstone. "Not much publicized, but admired by his chiefs for certain ancient pagan knowledge. Quarrelled with Himmler because he, Gaierstein, suggested that Himmler's elite henchmen needed special initiation before they assisted at the old rites with which Nazi chiefs wanted to replace German churches. Nobody knows how Gaierstein died, except that he did die, completely and messily. I know about him. That's where my black art studies come in."

"This *rondache* was in a vault within the vault," explained Norbier. "The other art objects fell into two classes—expensive popularized items, and pretty average obscenities. This was something special. There was no way to find where it came from. Finally I secured its release to me."

He turned back to the painted round and touched its edge with his finger. "I've been at pains to clean it without damaging. Only today there came to light this writing around the edge—a triple spiral of letters. What do you make of it, Thunstone?"

Thunstone bent, peered. His lips moved slowly, then seemed to freeze stiffly. He caught up the cloth and veiled the *rondache* once more.

"Norbier," he said, as earnestly as a judge on the bench, "if I've done you any service, do me one. Leave this thing alone for the time being. Don't uncover it or look at it until I return."

"Return?" repeated Norbier. "When?"

"Soon. Within an hour, perhaps. Agreed, Norbier?"

"Agreed," smiled Norbier, and Thunstone hurried out, with less courtesy than common with him.

LEFT alone in the study-shack, Norbier thought briefly that the silence was deeper and deader than it had been before Thunstone's call, and that the light on the ceiling was at once more lurid and less brilliant. He shook his big body, and smiled consciously to rid himself of such manifest illusions. He'd let himself become unsettled, ever so slightly, by Thunstone's strange manner in studying that triple-spiral of letters around the edge of the *rondache*. He told himself to leave creep-sensations to Thunstone. Who was Thunstone, anyway? A man of undenied gifts and scholarship, who nevertheless fiddled and fumbled with superstitions ordinarily taken seriously by nobody over the Hallowe'en age. There were those rumors about Thunstone's enmity with some self-styled wizard named Rowley Thorne, and Thorne's destruction, and those others, even less clear, about some people called Shonokins—was that the right word?—who weren't people, but something like people. Norbier could not even remember where he had heard the stories, or whether they had been told for the truth.

Anyway, he had better things to think about. This *rondache* was the work of Leonardo da Vinci, without whom the Renaissance would certainly not have been the Renaissance. More than that, it was perhaps the first artistic labor of Leonardo da Vinci ever to attract more than family notice, and it was the basis of a delightful story of a great man. Leonardo, blessed demigod of the Quatracento—here was his first token of greatness. Even if Norbier had been aware that he had made a solemn promise to Thunstone, he now forgot it. One hand twitched the covering cloth from the *rondache*.

No getting away from it, even after so many glimpses he found the impact of that painting almost physically strong and daunting. But Norbier, for all his appearance of lazy softness, was neither naive nor cowardly. He sat down before the painted thing to study it.

If Leonardo da Vinci, a curly-blond boy in his teens, had studied lizards, bats and spiders for this, he had not hodge-podged his studies. Anyone else would have been content with a lizard's body, a spider's knuckly jointed legs, a bat's wings. Not so Leonardo, master of his eye and hand and brush even before his voice had changed and the first peachy fuzz had sprouted for the beginning of that apostolic beard he was to wear. What had Thunstone said? ". . . . blending and flavoring them with his own genius." That was right. It sounded almost like a phrase from an art critic's description, what time Norbier would call in the art critics. But first he would enjoy the thing to the full, then decide which museum

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—civic or university—to offer it to as a loan. Not a gift, a loan. Then the critics would come and stare and wonder and worship.

Gazing and pondering thus, Norbier told himself that he was seeing the odious figure in the center of the round wood more clearly than ever before. It had clarity and life, that ancient color on that ancient wood. The thing was head on toward an observer, but you sensed the shape and extent of the foreshortened body, at once lizard-lithe and spider-squat. The legs—there seemed to be a great many of them—were hairy and jointed, but those in front, at least, bore handlike extremities, reminiscent of the forefeet of lizards. Those wings were true da Vinci work; Norbier remembered the tales of how da Vinci, seeking to invent the airplane centuries before Langley or Wright, studied painstakingly every flying creature, bat, bird and insect. As for the thing's head, that was apparently meant to seem a squat, dark-furred blotch, with two glowing close-set eyes peering from the thick fur as from an ambush. A real face to it, flattened like a bat's, and a mouth with a jaw of ophidian shallowness, but a little open, to show . . . yes, fangs. No wonder that everyone who saw the thing, from Piero da Vinci to the present, squared his shoulders a trifle to dissemble a shiver.

THE writing around the rim, now. Oddly enough, Thunstone had been more impressed with that than with the picture. Men had told Norbier that Thunstone was never frightened, but Norbier thought different. What said the writing? It was a string of Roman capitals, that began at almost the exact top of the *rondache* and curved away to the left around the wooden rim, then came back and made a second circuit within the first, and a third within the second—a triple spiral. Aloud Norbier spelled out some letters:

"A—G—L—A—"

A cross-mark came there. "The end of the word," he said, and enjoyed the comfort of his own voice's sound. "If I read backward from left to right, there are words. What language? Let's see."

He took hold of the *rondache* and revolved it, reading more words aloud as they came to the top:

"Agla . . . Barachiel . . . On . . . Astasieel . . . Alpahero . . . Raphael . . . Algar . . . Uriel . . . end of the first circle."

Some of the names sounded familiar, names from old songs or prayers. He revolved the disk to read the second circle:

"Michael . . . Iova . . . Gabriel . . . Adonai . . . Haka . . . Ionna . . . Tetragramaton."

That last name he had heard before, and neither in song or prayer. Some devil-story—wasn't Tetragramaton a fiend or goblin? Once more he revolved the disk, reading the final circle of names:

"Vusio . . . Ualactra . . . Inifra . . . Mena . . . Iana . . . Ibam . . . Femifra."

Norbier wished Thunstone had remained. But Thunstone said he would return. The names might mean something to Thunstone. Meanwhile, that monster-painting continued to impress. Any fool, even someone with no art appreciation, must admire the master touch of the boy who had been Leonardo, son of Piero da Vinci. The flat representation actually looked three-dimensional, as though it were a bas relief.

"Hmmmm!" grunted Norbier aloud. For it was a bas relief. He hadn't noticed that before.

The painted figure, too adroit to be grotesque, actually bulged from the flat surface of the wood. Norbier put out a hand to explore its contours—and snatched the hand back. Something had moved behind him, in the direction of the dying fire on the hearth, with a solid *plunk*.

He hopped out of his chair, as swiftly as John Thunstone might, and spun around to face whatever it was. For the instant he fully expected to see something, big and living, crawling out of the fireplace toward him; something that had come down the chimney, a sort of baleful antithesis of Santa Claus, with gifts of violence or ill fortune.

There was nothing there. No movement. Norbier became aware that he was fluttering and writhing the hand with which he had touched the *rondache*, and rubbing its fingertips together. Those fingertips still harbored a sensation of unpleasantness. For when he had touched the likeness of the monster, it had seemed to stir and yield, as painted wood could and would never do.

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That was what had startled him, more than the noise from the direction of the fireplace. But what had made that noise?

He walked warily across the floor, and then he saw. A book had fallen from his shelf beside it, and lay open on the reading table below the shelf. He bent to see. The Bible, of all books—it had popped open to Isaiah, the eighth chapter. His eyes caught the verse at the top of the inner column, the nineteenth verse:

And when they say unto you, Seek them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter. ...

It was coincidence, of course, this passage, but Norbier cursed his imagination that made him think he heard actual muttering behind him. His eye skipped to the last verse of the chapter:

And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness.

"Dimness of anguish," repeated Norbier aloud, for he relished the neat turn of a phrase. "Driven to darkness. Sounds as if it should fit in somewhere with what's going on—

"What IS going on?"

Again he whirled around, facing toward where the *rondache* was propped up on the table opposite.

Something huge, heavy, many-legged, was lowering itself with ponderous stealth from the tabletop to the floor.

NORBIER stood dead still, his brain desperately seeking to explain what he saw. Explanation came.

Hypnotism. That was it. Self-hypnotism. He had gazed too intently at the painted nightmare. Or, more likely, it was that triple spiral of letters. He'd read, a year ago, something in a national magazine about hypnotism and how it was induced. You can hypnotize yourself by gazing raptly at a helix—a spiral line, curving in and in and in within its own whorls to a central point. You look at it, and it eventually seems to begin turning like a pinwheel, and you go to sleep. You may have dreams in that sleep. That was what he, Norbier was doing now—sleeping, dreaming.

The entity had completed its slow, ponderous journey from table to floor. It seemed to crouch there, then to hoist itself erect on the tips of its multiple claws. Among the curved, jointed brackets of its legs hung a puffy body, like a great crammed satchel. The integument had pattern, like scales, and from the spaces between the scales sprouted tufts and fringes of dark fur, like plush grown wild. And it had wings, also scaly and tufted, ribbed like a bat's, that winnowed and stirred above its bulk. The head, a shaggy ball, craned in his direction. Deep within the thicket of fur upon the face clung two wise, close-set eyes, that glowed greenly, then redly, at him. Between and above them the fur seemed to part in two directions, as if the undeveloped forehead frowned. A mouth opened, the light caught a stockade of white, irregular, pointed fangs. A great gout of foam came out, and fell splashing on the floor.

THE talons scraped on the floorboards, like the tines of a dragged pitchfork. The creature moved toward Norbier. The two foremost limbs rose, and at the ends Norbier saw hand-like claws, like the front feet of a big, big lizard.

He shook his head, like a mauled boxer trying to clear his wits. He kept remembering that article about hypnotism. It was never of long duration. Even if someone hypnotizes you, and falls dead next minute, you have a short nap and waken again, as well and serene as ever. But while you napped, what dreams may beset you. Norbier tried to retreat before the advance of the creature, and his back came up against the bricks at the side of the fireplace. He reached down and caught hold of a pair of fire tongs.

"Get back from me!" he bawled shakily, and lifted the tongs as if to strike.

The wings flapped and stirred the air. The big body—it looked as big as a bear—rose slowly from the floor. Another flap of the wings, and it sailed at him. He swung the tongs, missed. A wing brushed him with its furry tip, the shape circled round in the glaring light, and dropped down facing him near the opposite wall. Norbier felt sick. The touch of the furry wing had seemed to nauseate him, to weaken his joints.

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The creature was lifting itself on its wings again. This time—

"Stay against the wall, Norbier!" came the stern, quiet voice of John Thunstone.

Norbier could not have moved from his position against the wall had he tried. He sagged there, grateful for the solid brickwork, and his eyes seemed to cloud over so that only as a huge, vague shadow did Thunstone move forward and in front of him. Toward Thunstone came another shadow, also big and vague, but seeming to flap wings and flutter many legs.

"Would you, though?" Norbier heard Thunstone say, and there was a quick move as one shape moved to meet the other. Norbier's inner ears were wrung and jangled by a cry, so high as almost to top the audible range for human hearing and go among the soundless vibrations—a cry sharpened by pain and rage and terror, such a cry as might be uttered by a bat larger and more evil than all bats ever seen or imagined.

Norbier dashed at his eyes with the back of his hand, and he saw the struggle. Thunstone was poking or thrusting with something—with Thunstone's back toward Norbier, the weapon could not be seen. The creature retreated before him, trying to strike or grapple with some of its limbs.

"Get back," Thunstone was saying. "Back where you started. There!"

THE thing had scrambled up on the table. It was shrinking unbelievably—no longer bear-size, more the size of a cat. It retreated toward the standing *rondache*. It was gone. The *rondache* showed the picture Norbier knew. Thunstone quickly laid down something slim and shining, and seized the *rondache* with both hands. He spun it around and around, from left to right. He faced toward Norbier.

"All safe now," he said, quite cheerfully.

Norbier gazed at a splattery blackness on the floor—an uneven wet blot, another and another beyond, clear back to the table. It would look like the trail of blood from a wound, but it was so black. His nostrils caught, or he thought they caught, a sickening odor. He swayed, pawing at the wall for support.

"Sit in that chair next to you," said Thunstone, and Norbier managed to reach it. Thunstone laid the *rondache* down and made a long stride, swift as a tiger, to a cupboard. The door was locked, but Thunstone plucked it open with a rending rasp of broken metal. He explained in satisfaction, drew out a bottle and poured from it into a glass. "Drink," he said, steadying the glass in Norbier's hands.

It was good brandy. Norbier reflected that he always bought the best brandy. He looked up, revived. His eyes sought the shining, slender object on the table beside the *rondache*.

"That?" said Thunstone, following the direction of the glance. "It's a stabbing blade, made of silver—black magic never faces silver, you know. Silver bullets kill witches and werewolves, silver charms keep away devils. Someone has claimed that Saint Dunstan himself forged that blade. It isn't the first time I've used it successfully, nor the second or the third."

"I'm—sorry, Thunstone," Norbier managed. "I got looking at that spiral of writing—"

"Of course. And you turned it around three times from right to left—widdershins, contrary to the clock and to the sun. That let the demon come out to you. And any one of fifty legends will convince you that no demon wants to be called up by someone who is at a loss for ways to treat it. I put it back where it came from, by turning the *rondache* the opposite way."

"But that isn't a work of Leonardo!" Norbier protested, feeling like a child whose dearest illusion has been shattered. "Not Leonardo! He might have to do with gods, but not with devils."

"Think of the story of the *rondache*," reminded Thunstone gently. "Leonardo's father was frightened by the picture, but he was money-conscious enough to offer it for sale. Who would buy such a thing from him, and for what purpose?"

NORBIER made no answer, and Thunstone went on. "A sorcerer, naturally. Italy was full of them then, and they are not gone from the world. The addition of the spiral writing, and the method of turning it, was a spell to invoke the monster."

"Destroy it," begged Norbier. "What-

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ever I spent for it will be money well spent if the thing is put out of existence."

Thunstone smiled. He had picked up his silver blade and was wiping it.

"I rather hoped you would say something like that, Norbier." He bent and caught up a rod that lay on the floor. Norbier saw that it was a walking stick, but hollow. Thunstone fitted the silver blade into it, and so out of sight. Leaning it in a corner, he went back and took up the *rondache*. This he carried to the fireplace, stirred the last coals with a careful toe, and put the round wooden disk upon them.

There was a leap of flame, pale and hot as the center of a blast furnace. Around that leaped up a circle of glowing redness, and sparks rose as from a fireworks display. They died down again, fat, black clouds of vapor billowed and vanished in their turn. When Norbier looked closely, the wood was burned to ashes. Norbier rose and walked to where the open Bible lay.

It was as if some power tried to warn me," he said. "Look at what this page says —no, the pages have turned."

"There was considerable stirring of air in here," observed Thunstone. He came to Norbier's side. "Now the book is open to the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John. If your other reference warned you, this should comfort you."

He put his finger on the page. "'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God,'" he read. "'The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.'"

Thunstone smiled at Norbier. "That's enough, eh?"

"No, it's not all," demurred Norbier, studying the page. "Look below, where the sixth verse begins. "'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. . . .'"

John Thunstone put out his hand and closed the book. "All my life I've tried to deserve my name," he said softly. "Some day, perhaps, I shall deserve it a little."

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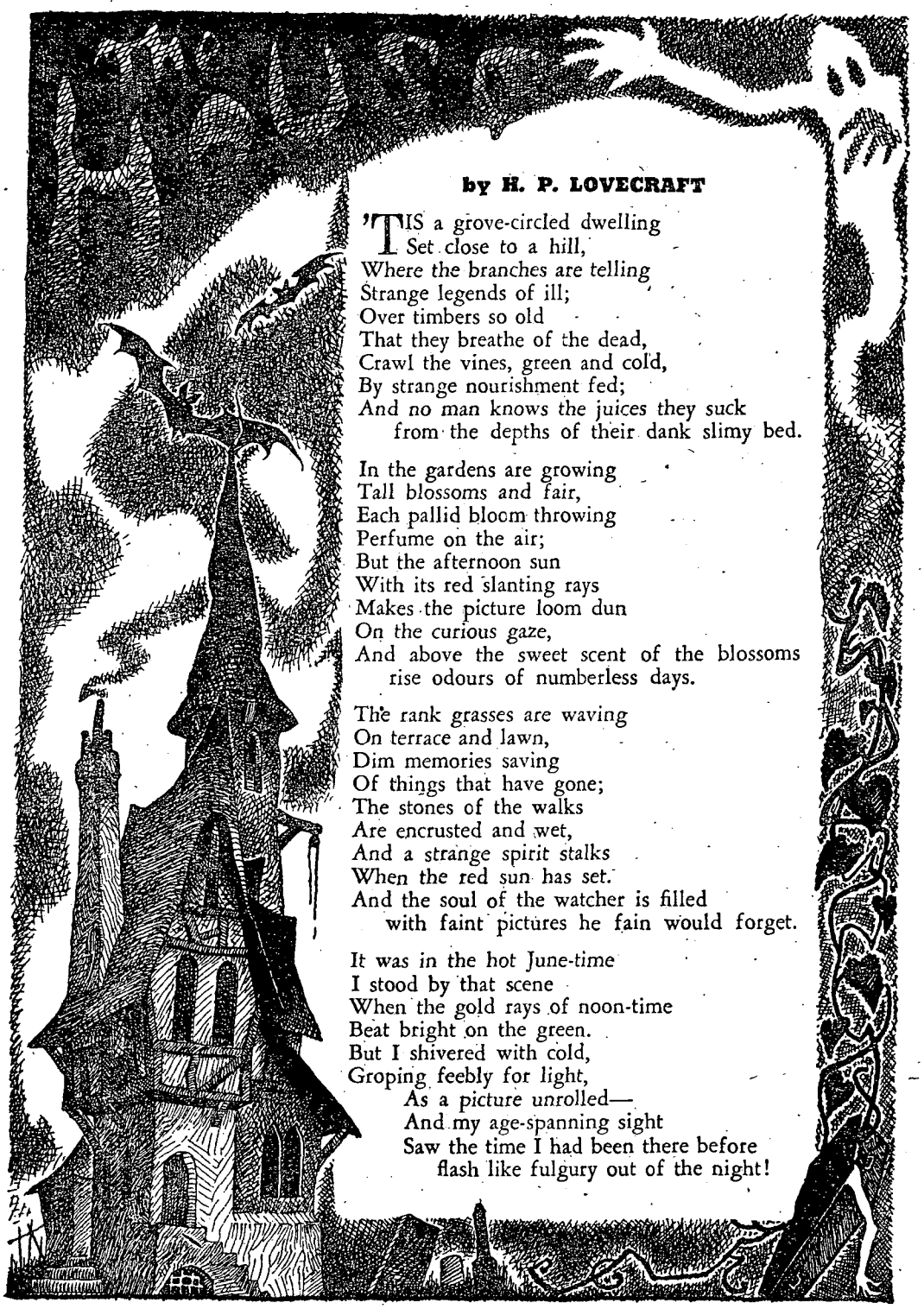

by H. P. LOVECRAFT

'TIS a grove-circled dwelling
Set close to a hill,
Where the branches are telling
Strange legends of ill;
Over timbers so old
That they breathe of the dead,
Crawl the vines, green and cold,
By strange nourishment fed;
And no man knows the juices they suck
from the depths of their dank slimy bed.

In the gardens are growing
Tall blossoms and fair,
Each pallid bloom throwing
Perfume on the air;
But the afternoon sun
With its red slanting rays
Makes the picture loom dun
On the curious gaze,
And above the sweet scent of the blossoms
rise odours of numberless days.

The rank grasses are waving
On terrace and lawn,
Dim memories saving
Of things that have gone;
The stones of the walks
Are encrusted and wet,
And a strange spirit stalks
When the red sun has set.
And the soul of the watcher is filled
with faint pictures he fain would forget.

It was in the hot June-time
I stood by that scene
When the gold rays of noon-time
Beat bright on the green.
But I shivered with cold,
Groping feebly for light,
As a picture unrolled—
And my age-spanning sight
Saw the time I had been there before
flash like fulgury out of the night!

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The Coming of M. Alkerhaus

BY ALLISON V. HARDING

THE extraordinary thing about it was the girl. She was a big girl, strongly built, with an expressive face that was also pretty, now a little defiant with what she had to do, as though it was against her inclination to speak to him. But she did and called him by his first name, although as he looked at her, her eyes nearly level with his—he was tall but she was nearly his height—you could see from his face that he knew he had never seen her before.

It seemed strangely right, though. The picture of him walking leisurely along on a downtown sidestreet only a little less aglitter than the main thoroughfares with movie and restaurant signs. You learned that it was a day-off for him and unusually hot for early spring. He'd been in the park earlier, lying on the grass, watching the roaring boys and the giggling girls rowing on the lake. He'd had his tiny portable radio with him—to listen to a snatch of concert or news or whatever. He was still carrying it with him now, swinging it in a warm, sweat-moistened hand.

And then she stood in front of him. Blonde, curling hair, broad-shouldered, large but perfect figure, her flowered dress—she was blocking his path. He stepped to go around her. That was when she spoke, as though driven to do it and in spite of herself. She called him by name. Next, as though by agreement, they fell into step, and he forgot to be as amazed as he should have been. Her name was Barbara and you know that something inside of him nodded as though it had been aware of that too all the time. He gave her a cigarette and she lit it with strong, capable hands, leaning against the side of a frail newsstand. The proprietor came bustling around the side to see what had shaken the flimsy sides of his little stand, but his angry words died at the sight of the two big young people. They went away laughing together.

THEY went familiarly along the hot, crowded sidewalks as though they'd walked the breadth of the world together. They both sniffed deliciously at the smell of hot roasted popcorn; chortled at the spectacle of the midget in a midget car arguing with the traffic policeman; stopped in front of the music shop, mutually touched with nostalgia as a record gave forth with a sweet version of "If You Were The Only Girl In The World."

Of a sudden he took Barbara's hand, squeezed it. "Come on!" She never asked once where they were going. Not even when they reached the garage and he took his small, last year's convertible out, but slid in beside him comfortably onto the leatherette seat.

"Too hot to stay around here. Let's drive out to the country!"

"It's a wonderful idea!"

They weaved through the crowd and noise, hit the Tube, and finally came out on one of those dim-getting-dimmer roads that leads directly away from the city. As they drove, it began to get cooler. After a while they began to climb foothills. Barbara

For after all, the past may be more readily forgotten than the future!

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

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flicked open the top of the tiny portable. An all-night record show was playing "If You Were The Only Girl In The World."

Neither of them said: "Funny," but of course they both were thinking it. He knew before he turned his head that Barbara was looking at him. She was humming with the radio. When he put his hand out, her hand was already there. He stopped the car. Took her into his arms. He kissed her and it was all the things that a kiss should be and more. All the things people write about, the people who have never experienced it and never will. This was the dream come true.

Finally they drove on. Up a desolate mountain road he had never taken before and chanced on now by accident. Dark, forbidding. It seemed they were nearing the top of the world. Finally the bumpy, dwindling road reached the crown of the summit. Ahead, dimly, lay the descending-trail. They were very close to the stars and the night itself.

Barbara nestled against him—but straightened as she felt him stiffen.

"What's that?" He pointed to a rocky promontory that stuck out some ways ahead of them on the mountain peak's side. Barbara looked where he pointed. She turned back to him.

"I don't see anything, darling."

But through his eyes there was the faint suggestion of someone, a dark bulk, silhouetted against the lighter horizon of the sky.

"We're not the only people in the world," he shrugged finally. "Maybe some local spooners like it up here too."

They embraced again and he started to talk. About how strange the whole business was, like fiction. He felt—and wasn't it trite to say it—as though he had known her all his life. He had so much he wanted to say, and yet, yet there was the quieting conviction that she *knew*, she *understood*, and that words between them were unnecessary. Of all the things he wanted to say, he spoke of very few. But always they were of a like and congenial mind. This could not be true, he said out loud. But it was.

They sat that way for a long time. Staring out into the night, looking back the way they'd come, the dark miles that stretched between this precious hill and the roaring hot, noisy city they'd left hours earlier. Looking back too, they told one another, of the useless past moments of their lives—before they'd known one another. And so the dialogue went.

AS they sat and looked at the sky, a wondrous finger of light appeared on the farthest horizon. It was faint-silver at first. As it fanned out, it grew into darker, redder shades. Finally it came to resemble a giant bubble of multi-colored light. The encore came fractional seconds later; the sound of thunder rolling towards them from miles away, like colossal waves breaking on some distant shore. The far-away sound was muffled as the burst of light was diffused over the long way they'd traveled.

As they watched, wordless, other huge bubbles of light appeared here and there on the horizon, to the left and right of the original burst. It was like watching the kaleidoscopic growth of some new world, a multi-colored panorama that belonged in imagination or dream, anywhere but here in our prosaic twentieth century night.

Finally they turned their wondering faces toward one another. Only then did he flick open the top of the small radio. There was an announcer—one of those tired all-night emcees from one of the small just-out-the-city stations. . . .

But for once he was not discussing the merits of Goodman, Condon, or Kenton. . . . instead the voice was tense, unmistakably scared . . . the words, the phrases came to their unwilling, unbelieving ears . . . *"a catastrophe which officials believe could be caused only by the multiple explosion of atomic bombs . . . can only presume that some unidentified foreign power . . . a state of national emergency . . . authorities ask that all those who are . . . medical services . . . so far . . no word from Washington but we expect . . ."* At that precise point the radio went dead . . .

* * * * * *

IN THE tiny, private projection room, young Stockton could fairly feel the tension mounting in the figure next to him as the film unfolded before them. President Trump of Magna-Acme was not pleased, Stockton could tell. As the reel continued,

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he could sense from the uneasy shifting next to him that Magna-Acme picture's head was not enjoying himself.

Finally the picture came to its shocking, climatic end. The lights came up. Frank Stockton looked at his employer. The other man was grim of face.

"This time, Alkerhaus has gone too far," the president wagged his head. "I could forgive that sort of unconventional love affair. Boy meets girl, you know what I mean. But I couldn't possibly release a film like this. The public wouldn't stand for it. It would shock them, scare the youngsters, you know what I mean, Frank?"

Stockton nodded. "It is a little ominous. I wonder *why* he goes in for these outre ideas. I'm still a little uncomfortable. Doesn't leave a very nice taste in your mouth."

"Thing is," the big executive chewed his lip miserably, "M. Alkerhaus is mighty important to us. I can't very well tell him it's no good. And that isn't even it. Damn, Frank, I never get anywhere with that man, trying to argue with him. I always have the feeling he's laughing at me."

The two sat in silence for a while. Frank leaned back and contemplated the ceiling of the small projection room. The picture had bothered him too. It was amazing what an ability Alkerhaus had to do just that. To bother you. To get under your skin. To make you gulp or cry, or—like this one—scare you plenty.

"Who are these people? The man seemed more than vaguely familiar."

"The actors?" Trump shrugged. "You know as well as I do the way he works. None of our regulars. People he gets, digs up here and there particularly for the job."

It was true. Although in some of the pictures M. Alkerhaus had done he'd worked with M-A stars, usually he preferred to find his own cast, claiming that he knew exactly what he wanted and often they were not to be found on the casting lots. That was another bone of contention between his company and himself. But a man with Alkerhaus' ability usually won his points. Other companies would have jumped at the chance to get him. And his pictures made money. To the astonishment of the gray, ulcers-and-whiskey little men of the trade who thought in their staccato way (the only way they ever had) that they knew all the answers to What The Public Wants. That was before M. Alkerhaus came along.

M. Alkerhaus was a genius. Even his enemies thought so. But he was a frightening little man. He frightened you with his eyes. And he frightened you with his thoughts. His thoughts were not the same as other people's; they couldn't be because he was so very different.

He might have been a fisherman in the Red Sea, or a drifter along the quays of the Seine or the proprietor of a "poorly" store somewhere across the world. Instead, he was M. Alkerhaus, movie creator and director.

HOW he had popped up at Magna-Acme pictures was something of a mystery even to those few who felt they knew the most about him. But there he was, small-statured, with set pieces of pale blue for eyes, the black cape he was never without, like a villain from the "silent" days, one detractor sneered. He admitted readily enough that "M. Alkerhaus" was a taken name. It might just as well have been "P. Okretech" or "N. Tobisech." Something unusual as the man—or nothing!

Stories were somewhat confused, but the most reliable had it that Alkerhaus had just appeared at Magna-Acme, demanded an interview with its president—and that he had immediately got it was as entirely believable to those who came to know him as it was unbelievable to those who know the ways of movie companies, and Magna-Acme particularly. He then proceeded to exhibit a short film he had brought with him; presumably a sample of his work. At any rate, J. C. Trump, President Trump of Magna-Acme had emerged from the private projection room greatly excited. He spoke to his staff members of "startling new techniques." He waved his hands enthusiastically for more than an hour. Alkerhaus was given a contract.

But these things, the mysterious way he suddenly appeared from nowhere, and then getting one of the top jobs in moviedom, these were not a measure of his greatness. It was his pictures. His ideas and the way he developed them. To begin with they were startling, amazing—and more than all the

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other adjectives of the industry rolled together. They surprised and amazed people who'd been working in the medium for years. And although many, in the beginning, claimed that the techniques were "far above the head of a public which demands cheesecake, excitement, young love, and very little more," surprisingly enough, movie-goers began to take to Alkerhaus productions. Soon his films rated high and were moving higher on the "earnings" sheets. So even his enemies came to admit that M. Alkerhaus had something. Just what, nobody quite knew or dared to put into words!

There were times when President Trump was worried. And he would call M. Alkerhaus into conference. But that never seemed to get anybody anywhere—especially Trump. His prize performer would still go on making the sort of pictures he wanted to make.

Frank Stockton also worried. Frank was Trump's vigorous aide-de-camp, young and enthusiastic, who "yessed" often enough to keep his job but not so much that he lost his personal integrity.

Stockton got into movies as so many do. He'd been a writer of only moderate success. But he'd written something that Magna-Acme and some of the other studios bid for.

He woke up one morning to find he was considerably richer by virtue of a movie sale . . . and the property of M-A. He'd been miserable working on obscure grade C serials, but he'd been paid nicely. So nicely that when he came disgustedly to resign, Mr. Trump (in person) had sent for him. Next thing Stockton knew, he was a sort of combination "leg" man and confidante of the owner himself.

THEY made a strange duo. Trump on the other side of sixty; short, fat and dark, with a round, grimacing face. Stockton was young, not more than middle thirties, tall, sensitive and still well able to take care of himself on a tennis court or at the Trump Magna-Acme conferences.

From the beginning, young Stockton had championed Alkerhaus. The strange little man was precisely what Hollywood needed, he felt. For in a colony built of, and on, superlatives, there was little that was truly superlative. But M. Alkerhaus filled that description.

Early in his association with Magna-Acme, other directors and "powers" in the company, recognizing the small, black-caped eccentric as a threat to their own painfully builtup prestiges, attempted to discredit Alkerhaus, his suggestions and his work.

Although the man personally repelled and rather awed him, Frank Stockton, more than once found himself alone standing at the side of M. Alkerhaus—and it was almost as though he too were the butt of thinly concealed sneers and derisive looks.

ON ONE particularly memorable occasion, there had been a heated discussion on the question of utilizing pseudo-surrealistic effects for a scene in a horror picture Alkerhaus was doing. One scene showed the villain standing atop a cliff, swearing vengeance on pursuing mobs below. He is holding in his hands a branch, still green as when he'd torn it from the tree to use as the only available weapon. Then, in the picture, the branch fades and becomes a child.

"Now *really!*" argued Sam Opal, a rival director. He looked and talked his disgust. "We're going *forward* in the cinema, not backwards! This is silly, unreal. Impossible!"

The other Magna-Acme importants joined in to support Opal.

M. Alkerhaus seemed not to listen, and this further infuriated his critics, particularly Opal.

Finally President Trump stirred the man into a reply. The somber, tiny figure arose, in black cape as usual— "silly affection" they'd sneered—and said simply:

"Gentlemen, the expression of an idea is not restricted to the rules of this day alone. As for reality, well, who is to say what is real and what is unreal."

That phrase stuck in Frank's mind. Stuck in the days and weeks and months that followed during which Opal did his best to make trouble for M. Alkerhaus while the others temporized.

Then came Opal's tragedy. And this broke the man completely, taking from the scene Alkerhaus' most vociferous, powerful critic and enemy.

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YOU may recall what happened. It made page one. How a demented escapee from the county asylum had crept into Opal's house, stolen Opal's only child, his little daughter, from her crib. The helpless youngster was later dashed to her death by the madman from a mountain side as a wary posse closed in. Some papers carried on-the-spot pics of the deranged man holding Opal's child just before he hurled her to her death.

But,—and what a coincidence everybody clucked at the time—there was this particular scene almost exactly like the real case in a latest horror movie. Too gruesome! Just to think. Made by the company that employed Opal, too. Wouldn't it be just *too terrible* if *he* . . . but no. The director was not Opal—M. Alkerhaus, the credit read. After all, coincidences can go just so far, can't they!

Stockton got an uncomfortable feeling every time he viewed a new Alkerhaus picture after that. It was not something he could definitely put his finger on. There is a discomfort, an uneasiness that is so vague that it is not possible to pin it down to one causative.

Young Frank, in his capacity as assistant to Trump, viewed all the new films in the tiny projection room just off the president's office. He and Trump saw many of the movies before other staff members. And he and Trump talked them over.

It was that way with No. 67-A. No. 67-A was an Alkerhaus. And so, as it had become Mr. Trump's habit, he would give the film a very careful once-over. The executive was bothered by a recurring thought. And although they never got together to discuss the thing, it was the same imponderable that worried Stockton. Beyond their admiration for his undeniable skill and the great and valuable asset of M-A he was, Trump, like Stockton felt there was something here that did not meet the eye.

It was not that they thought of those things that are obvious and commonplace. Some producers and directors pad accounts, get into all sorts of snarls in the production of their pictures, and ofttimes some funny business in the finances may be demonstrated. But here there was another, totally alien factor. Alkerhaus, with his silent ways, his knowing look that was not condescension, Alkerhaus with his unmistakable air of mystery.

ONE tangible Frank and Mr. Trump had to work on. Early in his association when, routinely and politely, the strange new director had been asked about his past; inoffensive questions, from whence had he come and so forth—he had replied curiously.

"Oh," he had answered with a wave of his small, yellow-skinned hand, "I come from a great many places."

But when one of the Board had insisted, he had said after a moment, "Paris."

The occasion arose later to check on that story. He was unknown in Paris. It startled Trump and Stockton, though they never mentioned it again. But no one ever found, either then or later just where Alkerhaus was from.

There were other only slightly less puzzling discrepancies. M. Alkerhaus would disappear, yes, literally disappear for days on end. Never, mind you, when in the process of doing a picture. Concerning such professional responsibilities he was meticulous. But in between, Trump or Stockton or one of the others would call up his place and there would be no answer. Alkerhaus would be gone. Gone from his house, gone from his familiar haunts and the circle of persons, none of them at all really intimate, who considered themselves the mysterious director's closest contacts. And then as unaccountably, he would show up again. Always bland, uncommunicative—and it would be as though the earth which had swallowed him had suddenly opened up its jaws and disgorged him.

But Magna-Acme knew they had someone. In an industry that todies to eccentricity, and in fact exploits it and puts a premium on it, M. Alkerhaus was certainly one of the more eccentric. He was also one of the most valuable. And that covers a multitude of eccentricities.

The strange director was, it seemed to most observers, rather more impressed with the seamier side of life. Witness his insistence on doing the horror film that so strikingly paralleled the Opal tragedy. He refused to be connected with musical comedies. Once he had been asked to direct

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an M-A film starring Dorah Deline the "legs" girl and Tiny Trinket, popular child luminary. He had refused. No noise, no words. Just a flat "no." It had stuck only because at the time Alkerhaus was finishing a sea story in which took place a terrific sequence of two colliding ships. It worked out so splendidly that even Trump, who did not care for insubordination from any of his employees, forgot the "No" and decided "so works genius!"

The sea movie was another uncanny instance of the way M. Alkerhaus clicked with timely events. The famous and tragic S. S. Gillespie collision with a second passenger liner came just at a time when his sea picture was being released. There was a strange, almost preposterous similarity between fact and fiction, critics remarked.

AND this same correlation between the pictures Alkerhaus worked on and events to come was true. Not once or twice, but again and again. There was the famous and fabulous story woven about the railroad empire, "Steel Road to the Horizon." That took a long time to make. And when it was finally released some years later, simultaneously in the big cities, its opening corresponded almost to the month with the tragic crash on the Southern Union of the crack Coast Flyer with another string of Pullmans.

In Alkerhaus' picture, there was an almost exact replica of the train accident. There were other similar cases.

There was no wonder why then, that there was some covert pressure behind the scenes to get Alkerhaus to "brighten up" a bit and concern himself with things that weren't so morbid.

The conference with M. Alkerhaus about No. 67-A was three-cornered. Stockton, Trump and Alkerhaus. The president did not believe in the system used by many cinema companies of elaborate confabs, replete with all directors and executives of the company—and their relatives.

Jake Trump, with considerable beating around the bush, Stockton thought, finally came to the point.

He addressed himself to the director. "I don't feel that this company can release No. 67-A. I know you've worked hard on it and for some time, but it's taken a turn that I didn't anticipate. Remember, Alkerhaus, we don't supervise what you do, so we're not responsible if something isn't in keeping with the policies of this company."

Trump paused to see how his remarks were being taken by the director. The little man had said nothing. But his close-set, remarkable eyes watched the president's face closely.

The head of Magna-Acme continued. "It's a splendid film from a technical standpoint. Frank and I got quite lost in the story and spirit. But, my dear Alkerhaus, we are not in business to scare the living daylights out of people. Remember quite some years ago that invasion from Mars business that frightened everybody so? It's bad, I tell you."

Alkerhaus inclined his head with that typical small motion of his. "As you wish," he replied. "I'm sorry you do not like it." The capable director fixed Stockton with his exotic eyes.

"It's not that we don't *like it*, Mister Alkerhaus," Frank Stockton hastily put in.

"Not at all," reinforced Trump. "We're not hidebound as a company but, well, with something like this we'd have everything from the women's clubs to the churches down on our necks. It's a little startling, you know what I mean? Tell you what, Alkerhaus, get started on something else. Sky's the limit. Do what you want. Take any of our people, take as long as you want. But let's forget about No. 67-A."

Alkerhaus smiled a little then. His old, wise face looking strangely unusual. "There will be no other pictures," he stated simply.

TRUMP reddened, gulped at that. "Now look here, man. I don't intend to be dictatorial. You know what I mean; now don't let's take this thing in the wrong spirit. If it's . . . in fact, I think we should. Yes. I think it's about time you got a substantial pay boost. I was talking to Frank. . . ."

"Whether you released my film or not, it was to be the last," Alkerhaus repeated. He rose, inclined his head again and walked towards the door. Trump rose too, then nodded frantically to Stockton, his face agitated.

Frank followed the director out the door.

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He caught up with him just outside and they walked down the long corridor that led to the gate fronting the M-A motion picture building. He took the little man's arm gently.

"Listen, please, Mister Alkerhaus. Try to take a look at Trump's side of this thing. God knows we *hate* to have to worry about the silly reactions that the public manifests at certain types of films. But this is a little brutal, a little hopeless in theme. The people wouldn't understand. Now the last thing in the world Mister Trump wants is your resignation. Why, only the other day he. . . ."

"Stockton," the director turned opaque eyes upon the young aide, "shall I tell you the why of this situation? This was a picture I *had* to do. It was a picture that *had* to be done. Like all the rest of them. You will come to understand this. Especially you.

"And as for the rest of the world," he spread his hands wide, "there is good in many people, there is thought and action that needs to come out but which is being saved for a misty tomorrow. My picture would have made millions see that now is their tomorrow. If people had just a little time and no more, what wondrous things they could do with their lives."

The director would say no more but turned his mysterious eyes away.

It was less than a week later that the news came. Trump was still highly agitated by the loss of Alkerhaus.

"I keep waiting to see an announcement that he's working for Super-Productions or Twenty-First Century, Inc. I'll sue. I swear I will. Even Alkerhaus can't bust a contract like that!" The executive went back to plucking at his fingernails.

It was then that the message came through. Mr. Alkerhaus had died at his home the previous night of apparently natural causes! There was no elaboration. After the initial shock Trump quieted down. The nail-biting stopped. Finally the big executive allowed himself a smile.

"You know, Frank. Of course I hate losing him. But in some ways, this solves things. At least if he won't make pictures for us, he damn well won't be making them for a competitor!"

AND so it ended. There was a footnote and it created quite a stir for a while. On the day after his death Alkerhaus' body disappeared from the undertaker's. Nobody had a theory except the police. Theirs was that one of his fanatical fans had "hoisted" the corpse. This poor idea was the best one that anybody had. The episode was hushed up as police failures are and eventually forgotten.

Trump was no longer interested in the disposition of No. 67-A. Now that M. Alkerhaus was hardly in a position to make films for rivals, the executive gave the order to have it destroyed.

"Don't want to clutter up our files with stuff like that. It's not Magna-Acme at its best. Why, some of our boys might get the wrong idea and start dreaming up this morbid, fatalistic stuff themselves! Better forget it all."

But Frank Stockton, young and sensitive with thoughts other than just the making of money in his head, did keep thinking for a time. He'd always had a desire to know Alkerhaus better. The man did not invite friendships; he was as forbidding as midnight in a graveyard. But Stockton the writer—rather than Trump's aide-de-camp—was intrigued. But there were other things, other problems, and gradually the episode and the very name of Alkerhaus began to fade from his and many other minds.

IT WAS an unseasonably warm April evening that brought it all back. Trump had toted his money-made stomach trouble and high blood-pressure to the mountains. Stockton was at loose ends. He amused himself as best he could during the day; then in the evening it was a toss-up whether to go and see some competitor's film or go home. He was walking around the theater district when it happened.

Nothing up till that moment, mind you. Not a premonition, not a reminiscent chord. So that when it happened, it came all the more strikingly. A circumstance that speeded his heart, squeezed at his breathing—and felled those intervening years with the sharp, quick axe of sudden recollection.

She stood squarely before him, the blonde girl. A complete stranger, and yet as he

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watched her full red lips form a word, he knew what that word would be. It was his name she spoke. "Frank!"

Then the other pieces fell in like a mathematical equation as Stockton toted up the "now" against the distant but stronger-growing memory. For there in his hand was the portable radio; and the same flowered dress over her big, perfectly proportioned frame!

As in a dream, they talked and laughed by the newsstand, at the midget, sniffed the popcorn; then they both paused outside the music shop and Barbara (she'd told him her name as he knew she would and what it was, too) turned to him as the record started, her lips parted, and even as he recognized with horror the strains of "If You Were the Only Girl in the World," even as an awful fear choked him, there was this something else, and even stronger. Barbara. Her face, her lips that he wanted suddenly to kiss, there in front of milling hundreds on the hot city sidewalk.

"Reminds me," she said. He nodded. Murmured something about nothing like a song to take you back. Kept saying to himself, which is the dream . . . this or that other? This or the memory? He grabbed her hand then. Painfully aware that he was acting out his prescribed part.

Some of him, still heeling to reason, to a dreadful sense of his own terrible responsibility, made him make a frantic attempt. But the policeman he spoke to gave him a hearty slap on the back and winked broadly at Barbara standing just out of earshot.

"Now, don't you be worrying, me boy. Nobody's gonna *blow up* you nor me nor this city or they'll hafta answer to officer O'Reegan. Maybe I should tell your missus to count your beers the next time, eh?"

IT WAS done, the pathetically futile attempt. And now Frank rushed on through the streets, keeping the timetable of the deadly schedule, Barbara at his side, obedient, happy. He knew, as he stopped at the garage and got his year-old convertible, that before they had driven many blocks toward the Tube—oh yes, how *nice* it would be on such a hot spring evening to drive into the country—that she would turn toward him and say:

"I can't understand all this, Frank. I mean, coming up to you and knowing your name. It's well, *strange*. And I'm *not* the kind of girl. . . ."

Of course you're not, Barbara, he thought to himself. But on this fated night, you couldn't help yourself, any more . . . any more than I could. He let the car almost drive itself. The Tube and then the highway leading away into the country on the other side of the river, the lights becoming less frequent, the road narrower, Barbara oohing at the cool air.

The things they talked about were the things he knew they would talk about. What young people do talk about, but with a subtle difference. If she said something or gave an opinion, it was his thought almost exactly and the way he felt about things. And vice versa. It was uncanny.

They drove on through the night, going higher and higher. And at precisely the right time Barbara flicked open his portable. Of course it was playing "If You Were the Only Girl in the World." Neither of them said, "Funny," but they both thought it.

He stopped at the side of the road well out into the black countryside. He put his arms around her, around her firm, strong shoulders, and he kissed her and it was as perfectly right as he knew it should be.

Finally Stockton turned into the deserted almost undiscernible rutted trail that led up the mountain. They stopped on top. They sat and looked out at the night, the blonde girl's head on his shoulders.

He saw then the figure on the outjutting promontory, and Barbara, feeling his stiffening muscles, looked too, but, as he knew already it was to be, she saw no one.

He said his piece about "local spooners" and they sat happily together watching the darkness and the stars. Frank had quieted the turbulence within him. It was too far along now to stop anything. He allowed himself to be carried flowingly along those familiar halls of time and events.

SO THAT he was not the one to start when the sudden fanning living streaks and bubbles of light shot up on the horizon, followed by an ominous rumbling. Barbara's face was pale as she wondered. Her fingers clutched his. Then he flicked open

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the portable in time for the hysterical announcements . . . followed by silence.

"It's here the thing leaves me," Frank thought. "Here the pattern—my part of it—is broken." He helped the trembling girl out of the car, supported her as they watched the horizon ablaze. They watched for a long time and the light and noise even at these many miles was incredible. The planned pattern had left *him* now, though, Frank knew. It was elsewhere. Everywhere. He could visualize the cities, *all* the *cities* and *towns* and *nations* and *places* across the world. Ablaze, razed, destroyed as dying countries retaliated against each other blindly even in their final death throes.

Frank Stockton turned then, he knew not why, and saw the dark figure stalking toward them on the road. He instinctively put Barbara behind him. Then in fractional seconds he recognized the black cloak and the wise, timeless face. A face that for the brief moment he beheld it fully, had set in it all the hope and hopelessness, the wisdom and suffering of generations dead, born and unborn.

It was M. Alkerhaus. The old man walked by, slowly and with dignity, and disappeared down the trail toward the blazing horizon.

Stockton became aware of Barbara tugging at his sleeve.

"What is it, you're acting so strangely, as though, as though you *saw* someone?"

He shook his head. For a long time he held the trembling girl in his arms.

"What'll we do," she kept saying over and over.

He did not tell her of the things he knew. Knew, knew, knew—just as he had known since years ago about this night . . . even if he had forgotten for so long. He could see it all, the pictures in his mind more brilliant than the fiery scene actually before them. The flaming capitols and countries of the world, the everywhere that was no more—even now as they stood unharmed on this wild mountain.

Barbara turned her tear-stained, shocked face back to the city and said, "God, Frank, thousands, millions must have been killed and *we were just there!*" He squeezed her tighter.

She was silent for a moment, watching the ring of flames that almost circled them like Brunhilda's bier.

"Do you suppose, do you suppose *anybody* got out of there alive . . . do you suppose *anybody's left. . . .*"

Frank lifted her face and kissed her, tasting the salt tears on her lips as he did, but feeling her shaking die away.

And as they stood like that, the song came into his mind. It played in his head around and around. Their song. Truly. He pushed her gently from him and hummed the first stanza. She smiled and hummed the last.

". . . and you were the only boy. . . ."

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 3)

and perished in September, 1906, after eleven years of superservice to discerning readers on both sides of the Atlantic. True, it had a temporary recrudescence between December, 1919, and October, 1920, but in that little interval it functioned only as a zombie, without life or spirit.

The publication of WEIRD TALES filled a real want. Thrill-seekers, votaries of the ghost story, people fed up with the boy-meets-girl formula or the adventures of impossible detectives flocked to it as the thirsty flocked to wet-goods emporia at the recision of the Volstead Act, and writers who had turned out one or more good stories of the supernatural and found no market for them sent in their cherished brain-children with a sigh of profound thankfulness.

(Continued on page 51)

READERS' VOTE

THE MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN	THE OCTOBER GAME
THE COMING OF M. ALKERHAUS	CATNIP
GHOST HUNT	THE MASTER OF THE CRABS
THE LEONARDO RONDACHE	THE PROFESSOR'S TEDDY BEAR
THE LA PRELLO PAPER	THE MERROW
SOMETHING IN WOOD	ROMAN REMAINS

Here's a list of twelve stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City 20, N. Y.

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The La Prello Paper

BY CARL JACOBI

IF ANYONE desired to set James Halliwell off in a temper he had only to quote the platitude, "Live with your times." It was not that he stood against progress, but from a standpoint of personal happiness and contentment, he looked upon the developments of the last decade as insidious steps toward social decadence.

Halliwell liked good writing, good music and good art, but the modern schools of creative thought grated upon his senses. In keeping with his beliefs, he lived what he

Left something he didn't want by someone he'd all but forgotten. . . .

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

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considered the life of a respectable gentleman of the past. His bachelor apartment was in a down-at-the-heels district, still genteel, but one which had been passed by the forward march of the city. His car was a 1930 vintage, and his dress—white embroidered vest, starched collar, heavy watch chain with ivory charm—would have made a stylist turn away with a smile.

All went well with Halliwell in his musty routine until he received a telephone call one May evening. A man who mumbled his name and described himself as an attorney-at-law, informed Halliwell that he had inherited some land.

"But I have no relatives," the bachelor replied, bewildered. "Who would will me anything?"

"The land is part of the estate of Mr. Guy Bedering and may not amount to much, financially speaking. It consists of four lake shore lots at Lake Constance over in Deeple County. Do you know the place?"

"Yes, I believe so." Halliwell was thinking of Bedering and their many quarrels which had lasted for almost as long as he could remember. Bedering—potty old fool! Old enough to be Halliwell's father, he had considered himself a modern. Bought chrome chairs, went hatless out of doors, smoked those obnoxious cigarettes. He had moved away a year ago, and Halliwell hadn't heard from him since, but he must have relented in his argumentative stand at the end, for in life it was only their opposite views that had held them together.

The attorney continued, "If you will call at my office tomorrow, I'll give you the deed and the abstract and you can consider yourself the new owner."

Thus it was that noon of the next day saw Halliwell driving his old car at a humming twenty miles an hour out Highway 56, heading toward Deeple County and Lake Constance. He reached the lake at two in the afternoon, turned off into one of the many side lanes and began a search for his lots.

In due time he found them: a span of timbered land, two hundred feet in width by a hundred and fifty in depth, fronting a rutted road on one side and a rather marshy beach on the other. The timber, Halliwell observed, was worthless, consisting mainly of jack pine and second-growth poplar. Nor was the site particularly suitable for building purposes, it being low with poor drainage. But what puzzled Halliwell was the large old signboard that stood just off the road, upraised from the tall weeds on high stilts.

The sign had been painted and repainted and now was weathered almost past recognition. Still visible was the legend on one side: CRASH, THE CIGARETTE OF THE AGE. And on the other: USE McGOWEN'S ALL-PURPOSE FURNITURE POLISH. But why any advertiser should have considered proclaiming his wares on this God-forsaken lane was to Halliwell a mystery.

HE STOOD before the sign for several moments, studying it. The artist had utilized a familiar trick in the illustration that accompanied the "polish" legend. It showed an open door, with a table just beyond the threshold and on that table a huge bottle of the polish. The picture on the bottle label was the same: open door, table beyond, and bottle on the table. The effect on the observer was a wonderment how many doors there were in all. No matter how far he looked there was always another bottle and another door. Halliwell noted with interest that the artist had done his work with curiously exacting care. He had carried out the illusion to almost microscopic detail, and for a moment Halliwell thought he could sense it going on and on into infinity.

There was a ragged hole in the sign, where the wooden paneling had rotted. Looking through this opening, Halliwell saw the beginning of a small path leading down through the woods. The path looked cool and inviting, and after a moment's hesitation he stepped through the hole and began to follow it.

He was conscious instantly of the sudden quiet that surrounded him. The birds which had been chattering before abruptly ceased all sound, and even the hum of insects was absent. Only the waves could be heard, swashing up on the distant lake shore. He followed the path for twenty yards when it made an abrupt turn to the left, climbing toward higher ground. The trees were thinner here, and the soil became rocky and covered with granite outcroppings. But the path it-

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self was smooth enough; its surface was hard-packed gravel, and its borders were even and symmetric as if it had been made only a day or two before.

For some reason Halliwell felt nervous and ill at ease. The impression stole upon him that he had entered a tunnel of time within which all life hung in a state of suspended animation. He smiled at that and continued walking briskly. Now the lake shore disappeared, and he found himself going along a kind of narrow gallery, the view on either side cut off by high walls of granite. In this fashion he walked for the better part of an hour, all sense of direction quite lost, for the path turned and twisted repeatedly.

He was about to turn back in disgust when the way before him suddenly dropped; he rounded a corner and there before him was the signboard and his parked car. Halliwell looked back of him, puzzled. It seemed impossible that he could have made a complete circle, but apparently he had, and with a sigh he climbed into his car, glanced at his watch and started the motor.

He looked at the watch a second time. The timepiece must have stopped, for it still showed two-thirty, the hour of his arrival at the lots. Halliwell drove back down the lane, entered Highway 56 and began the trip toward the city at an even twenty-five miles an hour. He had gone a quarter of the way back when he relaxed his grip on the wheel for a moment to reach for his pipe. But the pipe was gone.

"Damnation!" Halliwell muttered. "I must have dropped it back there on the path."

Pipes were a fetish with him. He had one for each day of the week, and this was Saturday's briar, a full-bent favorite of his with a nickel-plated ferrule and a bowl that held a generous amount of tobacco. He hated to lose it.

Halliwell stopped the car, looked carefully in both directions, and satisfied that the highway was empty, made a complete turn and headed back in the direction from which he had come. Ten minutes later saw him entering the outskirts of a small town. He frowned perplexedly. He remembered no town here; in fact, he was sure he had passed none since he had left Lake Constance. But there it was, printed in faded letters on a sign over the railroad depot: EMIT.

Driving down the main street, he was impressed by the scrupulous neatness of the buildings and the residences. It was more than a neatness. It was a geometric simplicity of line and angles as if the town were still on the architect's drawing board. Halliwell glanced at the cars on either side of the street and nodded approvingly.

None of those foolish streamlined affairs here. They were all fifteen or more years old. A sign in a corner drug store somewhat disconcerted him though. It read:

Landon for President

"Ought to take that down," Halliwell muttered to himself. "No sense in being as shiftless as that."

HE CROSSED a bridge over a wide river, and he didn't remember that either. The only answer must be that in turning about, he had somehow got into the wrong lane and veered off into a second highway that ran parallel to 56. Satisfied with this line of reasoning, he increased his speed a little and presently ahead of him saw the blue circular expanse of Lake Constance.

Once again he drove down the rutted lane and parked before the broken signboard with the strange door illustration. He passed through the opening in the sign and began to retrace his steps along the path, eyes studying the ground carefully for his pipe. But he didn't find it. Aware now that the sun was beginning to drop in the west, he hurried back to his car.

But when he entered Highway 56 once more, something curious happened. Without thinking, he found himself reaching into his pocket for his pipe. He checked himself halfway and then uttered a little cry of surprise. The pipe was there in his pocket, deep down in one corner.

"I must be getting old," Halliwell said to himself. "I could have sworn it wasn't there before."

For the first time now he was conscious that something was wrong with the road before him, but the truth didn't strike him until he had gone almost a mile. Then abruptly he realized that he was no longer

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on black top but on hard-packed gravel. The familiar U. S. and State highway markings were absent, too" In their place Halliwell saw from time to time rustic placcards with the words: *Gablewood Pike.*

Yet the surrounding landscape remained the same or very nearly the same. He crossed the bridge, and if it appeared somewhat newer and the river below narrower than it had before, he attributed these changes to the different slant of the sun which was low down in the west now.

He came at length to the town of Emit, and entering its main street, found himself looking absently for the Landon sign. He was glad to see that the sign was no longer there, but it occurred to him that he might have passed without seeing it. Somehow, the town looked older and yet in another way newer than it had before. The economy of architecture and plotting struck him as it had the first time, but with it came the impression that there was something perceptibly old-fashioned about the place. Quite suddenly it dawned upon Halliwell that no cars were parked at the curb; the vehicles were all horse drawn.

"Some sort of old-time festival," he remarked. But even as the words came to his lips, a vague inner fear began to rise up far back in a corner of his mind.

The town finally behind him, Halliwell fell to thinking over the day's events. Now that he had the four lots he wondered what he would do with them. Sell them, he supposed, though in their present condition a potential market would be doubtful. It was queer about Bedering, willing him that property in the light of what had happened.

In a way they had been mutual friends and mutual enemies for more than ten years, ready to argue at the drop of a hat, each holding to his own ideas and beliefs. Halliwell had hated with a deep inner hate Bedering's complacent acceptance of new fads and styles, just as, he was aware, Bedering was irritated by his clinging to the past. Moreover, Bedering had seemed to take a delight in parading his newest acquisitions. Halliwell remembered well the day Bedering entered his apartment, walked straight across to the opposite wall and tore down the Currier & Ives "winter scene" that hung there in its heavy gold frame. He flung the picture to a corner where the glass broke in a hundred fragments and then mounted in its place some horrible work of cubistic art, replete with circles, squares and triangles.

"There," he said, standing back to admire the change. "I was getting sick and tired of seeing that crummy old chromo there. Improvement, eh?"

"Improvement! Get out of here, you blasted jazz maniac!"

BUT even as for no sane reason they had clung to each other's company, Halliwell had laid plans to gain retribution for the indignities he had suffered at the other's hands. He had thought of a number of things: applying acid to Bedering's chrome chairs, destroying his entire collection of worthless modern books, breaking some of his *classics in swing* records, but none of them seemed satisfactory. Then one day he hit upon it.

In his spare time Bedering was writing a monograph on what he called the "space-time coordinate." Some nonsensical drivel about the fourth dimension and another world impinged on our own. Bedering actually believed this. He said:

"We know that there are other planes of time, possibly two or three futures. I believe that this other world is a psycho-scientific one, and I believe my paper, when it is published, will arouse some comment."

Still smarting from the action taken against his Currier & Ives, Halliwell had slipped the manuscript in his own briefcase one night when Bedering was not looking, deposited it in the trunk of his car and left with a smug feeling of satisfaction. That manuscript was still in his car, though Bedering had asked him frantically several times if he had seen it.

"That'll teach him to mind his own affairs," Halliwell said. "The old fool!"

He had attempted to read the manuscript on one or two occasions when waiting for some appointment. But though he had studied the pages with care he could make no sense to any of it. Bedering had never quite got over the loss, and sometimes Halliwell caught him looking at him with eyes filled with suspicion.

Halliwell abruptly took his foot off the gas and applied the brakes. A wooden bar-

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rier extending the entire width of the highway loomed before him. As he came closer Halliwell read the sign painted in bright red letters:

ROAD CLOSED. DETOUR.

Drat these construction companies. Why did they always select the summer months for road repairing? He hesitated a moment, noting that there was a choice of two detours, one leading east, one west. He chose the western, reasoning that it must lead in a direction closer to the city.

The road was a bad one, and soon he found it necessary to reduce his speed to a crawl, with the old car banging and rattling in a most alarming fashion. In this manner he traversed a mile of detour when suddenly he drew up with an exclamation.

Was he quite mad or was the scene before him the same scene he had left behind him, miles to the rear? But no, there was the lake, the timbered plot of land, and the signboard. The same crazy signboard with the broken section and the illustration within an illustration of the open doors. But there was a difference, he saw with sudden relief, a very great difference.

The sign here was larger. It covered the entire right-of-way of the detour, and the road itself, not a path, continued through the ragged hole in the wooden paneling. Halliwell sucked his pipe thoughtfully. It didn't make sense, this building a signboard directly across a roadway. Then a thought struck him. The detour was doubtless a new one and a makeshift. It had been laid in the shortest route possible.

He started the car again and drove through the opening in the sign. Once on the other side, he saw no difference or change in the surrounding landscape, and that rather surprised him, for he had expected a change. If anything, the detour seemed in somewhat better condition here, and Halliwell began to think of what he would do when he reached home.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that the unforeseen happened. The car missed firing, coughed, sputtered and died. Scowling, Halliwell ground on the starter for several long moments before he thought to look at the gas gauge. Then he swore fervently. The needle of the dial rested on the "empty" mark. Stalled miles from no place and night coming on. This *was* a predicament.

"Well, I'll just have to stop a passing car and beg a lift into town," he told himself.

He waited in vain. The detour remained silent and deserted, and in the fast-thickening gloom no approaching lights showed in either direction. But old-fashioned though he might be, Halliwell was also a realistic individual. He went around to the car trunk, opened it and took out a pillow and a vacuum bottle of cold tea which he always carried. He also took out Bedering's sheaf of manuscript which still lay in a far corner of the trunk where he had left it almost a year before. Might as well do a little reading to pass the time, he thought. If worse came to worse, he could sleep in the car and walk to town in the morning. He settled himself, turned on the dome light and began to read.

AS BEFORE a noticeable spell of depression settled down upon him the moment his eyes fell on the first page. For a while he was impressed by Bedering's apparent erudition. Then he reached the following passage and re-read it several times.

> In 1874, La Prello, the Spanish mystic, formulated a theory which in my opinion crudely antedated Einstein. La Prello reasoned that time must be a variable dimension, extending into infinity from a common center like the spokes of a wheel. He who leaves point A, the hub, and advances along the time channel will as a matter of course arrive at point B. Yet if something were to disturb the existing coordinates—let us say a psychic impulse—who is to say he would not arrive at point C or even D?
>
> La Prello further postulated that if visual stimuli were placed before a receptive subject and that if that subject were contacted by certain mental impressions (outlined in what he called his "tempus diagram") the psychic residue might exert sufficient power to force the subject into a subsidiary time channel, regardless of his personal will.

"Balderdash," muttered Halliwell, "pure drivel." He tossed the manuscript into the

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rear seat of the car, leaned his head against the pillow and went to sleep.

When he awoke the sun was high, but the road was still void of any sign of travel. Halliwell rolled up the windows, locked the door and set off at a brisk walk. Finally, the road turned, and there before him was a town. Halliwell gazed at the familiar street and buildings and with an inner bewilderment that knew no answer, saw at once that it was Emit again. Like a man in a trance he headed into it, eyes casting about for a filling station.

He saw none. Neither did he see any cars. The few citizens he passed were dressed in antique fashion, and the street was lined with watering troughs and hitching posts. Well, if there were no gas stations, perhaps he could get a can of fuel at one of the general stores. He entered one and asked for the proprietor.

WHEN the man approached, Halliwell restrained a cry of astonishment. At first glance he was his old enemy, Bedering, in every detail. The same high forehead, the same bulbous nose, the same mocking twinkle in his eyes. Even as he saw that there were slight differences, Halliwell found himself voicing a question:

"Is . . . is your name, Bedering?" he demanded.

"Yes, it is. What can I do for you?"

"Not Guy W. Bedering by any chance?" Halliwell held his breath while he waited the answer.

"That's my son. He's in school."

"In school!" cried Halliwell.

"Yes, of course. Where else would a twelve-year-old be at this time of day. What was it you wanted, sir?"

Halliwell mumbled some vague reply and stumbled out the store into the street. In heaven's name, what was happening to him? Had he gone quite mad or was he still back in the car, dreaming a fantastic dream?

He entered a second store farther on and asked the clerk if he had any gas.

"Gas?" repeated the clerk slowly.

"Gasoline," snapped Halliwell.

"I've heard of it," the clerk said, "but we don't have any."

"Heard of it!" stormed Halliwell. "What is this, the state asylum or something?" He turned and strode out.

He paced rapidly out of town and onto the smooth expanse of Highway 56. He breathed easier when the buildings were behind him, but the air over the roadway was curiously hot and quiet. Not a leaf stirred; not a breath of wind was apparent. On and on, he walked, his car forgotten, with a long-gaited stride that ate up the miles. A profound silence hung over him. He could hear the grating of his steps in the gravel and the creak of the leather in his shoes, but that was all.

At the end of an hour Halliwell became aware that the road was growing narrower. The low stunted trees pressed close on either side, and weeds and brush began to appear in the center of the hard-packed surface. The emerald green of May foliage had lightened perceptibly, too, and he seemed to be moving in a pastel world with no definite boundaries or outlines. And then he saw it. A cry of consternation rose to his lips.

No, he was not mistaken. Before him, extending from right to left side of the road was that sign, the same mad sign with the door opening upon a door and the torn ragged hole at the bottom through which the road ran. As Halliwell advanced upon it, the sign seemed to grow in size until it was as tall as a three-story building. He was fighting two emotions now, a wild desire to turn about and run and an irresistible compulsion to pass through the opening.

A moment he wavered; then he stepped through and continued on the other side. He moved automatically, his brain and body filled with a strange numbness. The hills and trees which had been all about him were gone now. In their place his eyes seemed to trace invisible rectangles and ellipses piled like some monstrous tesseract on the surface of a barren plane. Yet the way before him was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water. All save that steadily growing dot at the limit of his vision. He began to study that dot as he walked on, and the fear within him multiplied at each step.

For he knew that it was another sign and that beyond it would be another and another and another and that he must keep on going into infinity.

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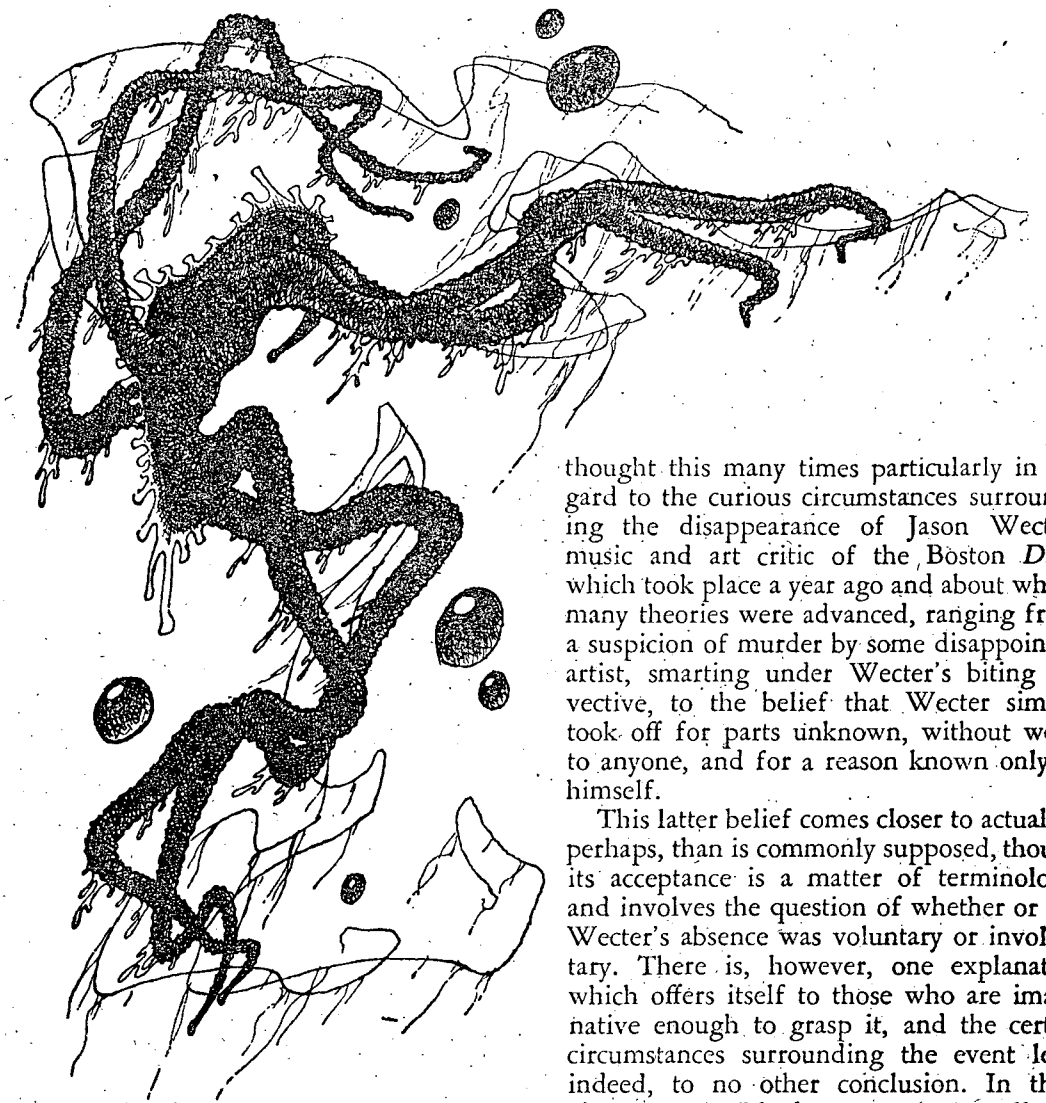
Something in Wood

BY AUGUST DERLETH



IT IS fortunate that the limitations of the human mind do not often permit viewing in proper perspective all the facts and events upon which it touches. I have thought this many times particularly in regard to the curious circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Jason Wecter, music and art critic of the Boston *Dial*, which took place a year ago and about which many theories were advanced, ranging from a suspicion of murder by some disappointed artist, smarting under Wecter's biting invective, to the belief that Wecter simply took off for parts unknown, without word to anyone, and for a reason known only to himself.

This latter belief comes closer to actuality, perhaps, than is commonly supposed, though its acceptance is a matter of terminology, and involves the question of whether or not Wecter's absence was voluntary or involuntary. There is, however, one explanation which offers itself to those who are imaginative enough to grasp it, and the certain circumstances surrounding the event lead, indeed, to no other conclusion. In these circumstances I had a part, not a small one, by any means, though it was not recognized as such even by me until after the fact of Jason Wecter's vanishing.

These events began with the expression

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

The piece was unique, but with no indication of menace

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of a wish, than which nothing could be more prosaic. Wecter, who lived in an old house in King's Lane, Cambridge, well away from the beaten thoroughfare, was a collector of primitive art work, preferably in wood or stone; he had such things as the strange religious carvings of the Penitentes, the bas-reliefs of the Mayas, the outré sculptures of Clark Ashton Smith, the wooden fetish figures and the carvings of gods and goddesses out of the South Sea islands, and many others; and he had wished for something in wood that might be "different," though the pieces by Smith seemed to me to offer as much variety as anyone could wish. But Smith's were not in wood; Wecter wanted something in wood to balance his collection, and, admittedly, he had nothing in wood save some few masks from Ponape which came close to the strange and wonderful imagery of the Smith sculptures.

I suppose that more than one of his friends was looking for something in wood for Jason Wecter, but it fell to my lot to find it one day in an out-of-the-way second-hand shop in Portland, where I had gone for a holiday—a strange piece indeed, but exquisitely done, a kind of bas-relief of an octopoid creature rising out of a broken, monolithic structure in a sub-ageueous setting. The price of four dollars was extremely reasonable, and the fact that I could not interpret the carving was, if anything, all the more likely to add to its value in Wecter's eyes.

I HAVE described the "creature" as "octopoid," but it was not an octopus. What it was I did not know; its appearance suggested a body much longer than and different from that of an octopus, and its tentacular appendages issued not only from its face, as if from the place where a nose ought to be—much as in the Smith sculpture, *Elder God*—but also from its sides and from the central part of its body.

The two appendages issuing from its face were clearly prehensile and were carved in an attitude of flaring outward, as if about to grasp, or grasping, something. Immediately above these two tentacles were deep-set eyes, carved with uncanny skill, so that the impression was one of vast and disturbing evil. At its base there was carved a line in no known language:

Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.

Of the nature of the wood in which it was carved—a dark brown, almost black wood with a hitherto unfamiliar grain of many whorls—I knew nothing, save that it was unusually heavy for wood. Though it was larger than I had in mind to get for Jason Wecter, I knew that he would like it.

Where had it come from? I asked the phlegmatic little man behind the cluttered desk. He raised his spectacles to his forehead and said that he could tell me no more than that it had come out of the Atlantic. "Maybe washed off some vessel," he hazarded. It had been brought in with other things but a week or two ago by an old fellow who habitually scavenged along the coast for such pieces among the debris washed up by the sea. I asked what it might represent, but of this the proprietor knew even less than of its source. Jason was therefore free to invent any legend he chose to account for it.

He was delighted with the piece, and especially because he discovered immediately certain startling similarities between it and the stone sculptures by Smith. As an authority on primitive art, he pointed out another factor which made it clear that the proprietor of the shop from which I had obtained it had practically given it to me at four dollars—certain marks which indicated that the piece had been made by tools far older than those of our own time, or, indeed, of the civilized world as we knew it. These details were but of passing interest to me, of course, since I did not share Wecter's liking for primitives, but I confess to feeling an unaccountable revulsion at Wecter's juxtaposition of this octopoid carving with Smith's work, arising out of unvoiced questions which troubled me—if indeed this thing were centuries old, as Wecter inferred, and represented no known kind of carving previously recognized, how came it that the modern sculptures of Clark Ashton Smith bore such resemblance to it?—and was it not more than a coincidence that Smith's figures created out of the stuff of his weird fiction and poetry, should parallel the art of some-

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one removed many hundreds of years in time and leagues in space from him?

But these questions were not asked. Perhaps if they had been, subsequent events might have been altered. Wecter's enthusiasm and delight were accepted as tributes to my judgment and the carving placed on his wide mantel with the best of his wooden pieces; there I was content to leave it, and to forget it.

IT WAS a fortnight before I saw Jason Wecter again, and I would perhaps not have seen him immediately on my return to Boston if it had not been for my attention being called to a particularly savage criticism of a public showing of the sculptures of Oscar Bogdoga, whose work Wecter had given high praise only two months before. Indeed, Wecter's review of his show was of such a nature as to excite the disturbed interest of many mutual friends; it indicated a new approach to sculpture on Wecter's part, and promised many surprises to those who regularly followed his criticisms. However, one of our mutual acquaintances who was a psychiatrist, confessed to some alarm over the curious allusions manifest in Wecter's short but remarkable article.

I read it with mounting surprise, and immediately observed certain distinct departures from Wecter's customary manner. His charge that Bogdoga's work lacked "fire . . . the element of suspense . . . any pretense of spirituality" was usual enough; but the assertions that the artist "evidently had no familiarity with the cult-art of Ahapi or Armnoida" and that Bogdoga might have done better than a hybrid imitation of "the Ponape school" were not only inapropos but completely out of character, for Bogdoga was a mid-European whose heavy masses bore far more similarity to those of Epstein than to the work of, for instance, Mestrovic, and certainly none at all to the primitives which were such a delight to Wecter, and which had manifestly now begun to affect his judgment. For Wecter's entire article was studded with strange references to artists no one had ever heard of, to places far in space and time, if indeed they were of this earth, and to culture patterns which bore no relation whatever to any at all familiar even to informed readers.

Yet his approach to Bogdoga's art had not been entirely unanticipated, for he had only two days before written a critique of a new symphony by Franz Hoebel given its initial performance by the flamboyant and egocentric Fradelitski, filled with references to "the fluted music of the spheres," and "those piped note, pre-Druidic in origin, which haunted the aether long before mankind raised an instrument of any kind to hands or lips." At the same time he had hailed a playing, on the same program, of Harris's *Symphony Number 3,* which he had publicly detested previously, as "a brilliant example of a return to that pre-primitive music which haunts the ancestral consciousness of mankind, the music of the Great Old Ones, emerging despite the overlayer of Fradelitski—but then, Fradelitski, having no creative music in him, must of necessity impose upon every work under his baton enough Fradelitski to gratify his ego, no matter how much it may slander the composer."

These two utterly mystifying reviews sent me in haste to Wecter's home, where I found him brooding at his desk with the offending reviews and a sizable stack of letters—doubtless in protest—before him.

"Ah, Pinckney," he greeted me, "no doubt you too are brought here by these curious reviews of mine."

"Not exactly," I hedged. "Recognizing that any criticism stems from personal opinions, you're at liberty to write what you like, as long as you're sincere. But who the devil are Ahapi and Amnoida?"

"I wish I knew."

He spoke so earnestly that I could not doubt his sincerity.

"But I haven't a doubt that they existed," he went on. "Just as the Great Old Ones appear to have some status in ancient lore."

"How did you come to refer to them if you don't know who they are?" I asked.

"I can't entirely explain that, either, Pinckney," he answered, a troubled frown on his face. "But I can try."

THEREUPON he launched into a not entirely coherent account of certain things which had happened to him ever since his

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acquisition of the octopoidal carving I had found in Portland. He had not spent a night free of dreams in which the strange creature of the carving existed, either in the foreground or ever aware on the rim of his dream. He had dreamed of subterrene places and of cities beneath the sea; he had seen himself in the Carolines and in Peru; he had walked by dream under leering gambrel-roofed houses, in legend-haunted Arkham; he had ridden in strange sea-going craft to places beyond the reaches of the known oceans. The carving, he knew, was a miniature, for the creature was a great, protoplasmic being, capable of changing shape in myriad ways. Its name, said Wecter, was *Cthulhu;* its domain was *R'lyeh,* an awesome city far under the Atlantic. It was one of the Great Old Ones, who were believed to be reaching from other dimensions and far stars, as well as from the sea's depths and pockets in space for re-establishment of their ancient dominion over earth. It appeared accompanied by amorphous dwarfs, clearly sub-human, which went before it playing strange pipes making music of no known parallel. Apparently the carving, which had been made in very ancient times, very probably before any kind of human record was kept, but after the dawn of mankind, by artisans in the Carolines, was a "point of contact" from the alien dimensions inhabited by the beings which sought return.

I confess that I listened with some misgivings, noticing which, Wecter, stopped talking abruptly, rose, and brought the octopoidal carving from the mantel to his desk. He put it down before me.

"Look at that carefully, now, Pinckney. Do you see anything different about it?"

I examined it with care, and announced finally that I could see no alteration.

"It doesn't seem to you that the extended tentacles from the face are—let us put it 'more extended'?"

I said it did not. But even as I spoke I could not be certain. The suggestion is all too often father of the fact. Was there an extension or not? I could not say then; I cannot say now. But plainly Wecter believed that some extension had taken place. I examined the carving anew, and felt again that curious revulsion I had first experienced at noticing the similarity between the sculptures of Smith and this curious piece.

"It doesn't strike you, then, that the ends of the tentacles have lifted and pushed out further?" he pressed.

"I can't say it does."

"Very well." He took the carving and restored it to its place on the mantel.

Coming back to his desk, he said, "I'm afraid you'll think me deranged, Pinckney, but the fact is that ever since I've had this in my study, I've been aware of existing in what I can only describe as dimensions different from those we commonly know, dimensions, in short, such as those I've dreamed about. For instance, I have no memory of having witten these reviews; yet they are mine. I find them in my script, in my proofs, in my column. I know, in short, that I and no one else wrote these reviews. I cannot publicly disown them, though I realize very well that they contradict opinions set down over my signature many times before this. Yet it cannot be denied that there is a curiously impressive logic running through them! since reading them —and, incidentally, the indignant letters I have received about them—I have given the matter some study. Contrary to the opinions you may have heard me express previously, the work of Bogdoga *does* have a relationship to a hybrid form of early Carolinian cult-art, and the third Symphony of Harris *does* have a marked and disturbing appeal to the primitive, so that one must ask whether their initial offensiveness to traditionally sensitive or cultured people is not an instinctive reaction against the primitive which the inner self instantly acknowledges."

He shrugged. "But that's neither here nor there, is it, Pinckney? The fact is that the carving you found in Portland has exercised an irrationally disturbing influence on me to such an extent that I am sometimes not sure whether it has been for the best or not."

"What kind of influence, Jason?"

HE smiled strangely. "Let me tell you how I feel it. The first night I was aware of it was that immediately after you left it here. There was a party here that

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evening, but by midnight the guests were gone, and I was at my typewriter. Now then, I had a prosaic piece to do—something about a little piano recital by one of Fradelitski's pupils, and I got it off in no time at all. But all the time I was aware of that carving. Now, I was aware of it on two planes; the one was that on which it came into my possession, as a gift from you, an object of no great size, and clearly three-dimensional; the other was an extension—or invasion, if you like—into a different dimension, in relation to which I existed in this room against the carving as a seed to a pumpkin. In short, when I had finished the brief notice I wrote I had the odd illusion that the carving had grown to unimaginable proportions; for a cataclysmic instant I felt that it had added concrete being, that it was reared up before me as a colossus against which I stood as a pathetic miniature. This lasted but a moment; then it withdrew. Note that I say it withdrew; it did not just cease to exist; no, it seemed to compress, to draw back, precisely as if it were drawing out of this new dimension to return to its actual state as it must exist before my eyes—but as it need not exist before my psychic perception. This has continued; I assure you, it is not an hallucination, though I see by your expression that you are thinking I've taken leave of my senses."

It was not as bad as that, I hastened to assure him. What he said was either true or it was not; the presumptive evidence, based on the concrete facts of his strange reviews, indicated that he was sincere; therefore, for Jason Wecter, what he said was true. It must therefore have meaning and motivation.

"Postulating that everything you say is true," I said at last, cautiously, "there must be some reason for it. Perhaps you're working too hard, and this is an extension of your own subconscious."

"Good old Pinckney!" he exclaimed, laughing.

"Or, if it is not, it must then have some motivation—from outside."

His smile vanished; his eyes narrowed. "You concede that, do you, Pinckney?"

"Presumptively, yes."

"Good. So I thought after my third experience. Twice I was perfectly willing to lay to sensory illusion; three times, no. The hallucinations experienced as a result of eye-strain are seldom as elaborate as that, tend to be limited to imaginary rats, dots, and the like. So then, if this creature belongs to a cult in that it is the object of worship—and I understand that its worship extends into our own day, though secretly—there seems to be but one explanation. I return to what I said before—that carving is a focal point of contact from another dimension in time or space; granting that, then plainly the creature is attempting to reach through to me."

"How?" I asked bluntly.

"Ah, I am not a mathematician, not a scientist. I am only a music and art critic. That conclusion represents the outside limits of my extra-cultural knowledge."

The hallucination had appeared to persist. Moreover, it had had an existence in his sleeping hours on yet another plane in that, during sleep, Wecter accompanied the creature of the carving without difficulty into other dimensions outside our own space and time. Consistent illusions are not rarities in medical case-histories, nor are those which develop progressively, but such an experience as Jason Wecter's was clearly more than illusory, since it extended insidiously into his very thought-patterns. I mused on this for a long time that night, turning over and over in my mind everything he had told me about the Elder Gods, the Great Old Ones, the mythological entities and their worshippers, into the culture pattern of which Wecter's interest had penetrated with such disturbing results for him.

THEREAFTER I watched the *Dial* apprehensively for Jason Wecter's column.

Because of what he wrote in the intervening ten days before I saw him again, Jason Wecter was soon the talk of cultural Boston and the surrounding countryside. Surprisingly, by no means all the talk about him was condemnatory, though the expected points-of-view were present; that is, those who had supported him previously were outraged and now condemned him; those who had previously scorned him, now supported him. But his judgments of concerts

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and art shows, though completely awry to my eyes, were no less razor-sharp; all his customary incisiveness and invective were present, his keenness of perception seemed not altered save in that he perceived things now, as it were, from a different perspective, a perspective radically altered from his past point-of-view. His opinions were startling and often outrageous.

The magnificent and aging prima donna, Madame Bursa-DeKoyer was "a towering monument to bourgoeis taste, which, unfortunately, is not buried under it."

Corydon de Neuvalet, the rage of New York, was "at best an amusing impostor, whose Surrealistic sacrileges are displayed in Fifth Avenue shop windows by shopkeepers whose knowledge of art is somewhat less than an amount necessary to be seen under a microscope, though in his sense of color he is tenth-best Vermeer, even though he never challenges even the least of Ahapi."

The paintings of the insane artist Veilain excited his extravagant admiration. "Here is evidence that someone who can hold a brush and who knows color when he sees it can see more in the world around him than most of the benighted who look upon his canvases. Here is genuine perception, unhibited by any terrestrial dimensions, unhampered by any mass of human tradition, sentimental or otherwise. The appeal is to a plane which stems from the primitive, yet rises above it; the background is in events of the past and present which exist in conterminous folds of space and are visible only to those gifted with extra-sensory perception, which is perhaps a property of certain people adjudged 'insane'."

Of a concert by Fradelitski of the conductor's current favorite, the Russian symphonist, Blantanovich, he wrote so scathingly that Fradelitski publicly threatened suit. "Blantanovich's music is an expression of that dreadful culture which supposes that every man is the precise political equal of every other, save those who are at the top, who are, to quote Orwell, 'more equal'; it need not be played at all and would not be if it were not for Fradelitski, who is distinguished indeed among conductors, for in the entire world, he is the only one who learns progressively less with each concert he conducts."

It was not to be wondered at that Jason Wecter's name was on every tongue; he was inveighed against, the *Dial* could not begin to publish the letters received; he was praised, complimented, damned, cast out from social circles to which he had hitherto always had invitation, but above all, he was talked about, and whether on one day he was called a Communist and on the other a die-hard reactionary seemed to make no difference to him, for he was seldom seen anywhere but at the concerts he had to attend, and there he spoke to no one. Yet, he was seen at one other place: at the Widener, and later it was reported that he had twice been seen in the rare book collection of Miskatonic University at Arkham.

SUCH was the situation when on the night of August twelfth, two days before his disappearance, Jason Wecter came to my apartment in a state which I should have judged at best to have been one of temporary derangement. His look was wild, and his talk even more so. The hour was close to midnight, but the night was warm; there had been a concert, and he had heard half of it, after which he had gone home to study in certain books he had managed to take from the Widener. From there he had come by taxi to my apartment, bursting in on me as I was getting ready for bed.

"Pinckney! Thank heaven you're here! I telephoned, but couldn't get an answer."

"I just came in. Take it easy, Jason. There's a scotch and soda over on the table; help yourself."

He bolted a glass with far more scotch than soda in it. He was shaking, not just in his hands, and his eyes were feverish, I thought. I crossed and put a hand to his forehead, but he brushed it brusquely away.

"No, no, I'm not sick. You remember that conversation we had—about the carving?"

"Quite clearly."

"Well, it's true, Pinckney. It's all true. I could tell you things—about what happened at Innsmouth when the government took over that time in 1928 and all those explosions took place out at Devil Reef; about what happened in Limehouse, London, back in 1911; about the disappearance of Professor Shrewsbury over in Arkham

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not so very many years ago—there are still pockets of secret worship right here in Massachusetts, I know, and they are all over the world."

"Dream or reality?" I asked sharply.

"Oh, this is reality. I wish it were not. But I have had dreams. Oh, what dreams! I tell you, Pinckney, they are enough to drive a man mad with ecstasy to wake to this mundane world and to know that such outer worlds exist! Oh, those gigantic buildings! Those colossi towering there into those alien skies. And Great Cthulhu! Oh, the wonder and beauty of it! Oh, the terror and evil! Oh, the inevitability!"

I went over and shook him, hard.

He took a deep breath and sat for a moment with his eyes closed. Then he said, "You don't believe me, do you, Pinckney?"

"I'm listening. Belief isn't important, is it?"

"I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"If something happens to me, get hold of that carving—you know the one—and take it out somewhere, weight it, and drop it into the sea. Preferably—if you can make it—off Innsmouth."

"Look, Jason, has someone threatened you?"

"No, no. Will you promise?"

"Of course."

"No matter what you may hear or see or think you hear or see?"

"If you wish."

"Yes. Send it back; it must go back."

"But tell me, Jason—I know you've been pretty cutting in your notices during the past week or so—if anyone's taken it into his head to get back at you. . . ."

"Don't be ridiculous, Pinckney. It's nothing like that. I told you you wouldn't believe me. It's the carving—it's reaching farther and farther into this dimension. Can't you understand, Pinckney? It's begun to materialize. Two nights ago was the first time—*I felt its tentacle!*"

I withheld comment and waited.

"I tell you, I woke from sleep and felt its cold, wet tentacle pulling away the bedclothes; I felt it against my body—I sleep, you know, without any covering but the bedding. I leapt up, I put on the light—and there it was, real, something I could see as well as feel, withdrawing now, diminishing in size, dissolving, fading—and then it was gone, back into its own dimension. In addition to that, for the past week or so I've been able to hear things from that dimension—that fluted music, for instance, and a weird whistling sound."

At that moment I was convinced that my friend's mind had cracked. "If the carving has that effect on you, why don't you destroy it?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Never. That's my only contact with outside, and I assure you, Pinckney, it's not all dark over there. Evil exists on many planes, you know."

"If you believe, aren't you afraid, Jason?"

He leaned toward me with his glittering eyes fixed on mine. "Yes," he breathed. "Yes, I'm horribly afraid—but I'm fascinated, too. Can you understand? I've heard music from outside; I've seen things over there—beside them everything in this world of ours palls and fades. Yes, I'm horribly afraid, Pinckney, but I will not willingly allow my fear to stand between us."

"Between you and who else?"

"*Cthulhu!*" he whispered.

At this moment he raised his head, his eyes far off. "Listen!" he said softly. "Do you hear it, Pinckney? The music! Oh, that wonderful music! Oh, Great Cthulhu!" And he rose and ran from my apartment, an expression of almost beatific bliss on his ascetic features.

That was my last sight of Jason Wecter.

OR WAS it?

Jason Wecter disappeared on the second day thereafter, or during the night of that day. He was seen by others, though not to talk to, since his visit to my apartment, but he was not seen later than the following night, when a neighbor, coming in late, saw him by the light of his study window, apparently working at his typewriter, though there was no trace of any manuscript to be found, nor had anything been mailed to the *Dial* for publication in his column in that paper.

His instructions in case of any untoward accident clearly called for my "ownership" of the carving described in detail as that of a "Sea God: Ponape Origin"—quite as if he had wished to conceal the identity of the

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creature depicted there; so presently, with the sanction of the police, I repossessed my property, and prepared to do with it as I had promised Wecter I would do, though not before I aided the police in substantiating their deduction that none of Wecter's clothing was missing, that he had apparently risen from his bed and vanished stark naked.

I did not particularly examine the carving when I removed it from Wecter's house, but simply put it into my capacious brief-case and carried it home, having already made arrangements to drive to the vicinity of Innsmouth on the following day and throw the object, duly weighted, into the sea.

That was why it was not until the last moment that I saw the revolting change which had taken place. It should be borne in mind that I did not actually see anything in the process of its taking place. But there is no gainsaying the fact that I did on at least two occasions previously, carefully examine the carving in question, and one of those times was at the special behest of Jason Wecter to observe fancied alterations which I could not see. And what I did see I must confess to seeing in a rocking launch, while I heard a sound which can only be described as of someone's voice calling my name as from an unfathomable distance, far, far away, a voice like that of Jason Wecter, unless the excitement of that moment served to derange my own senses.

It was when I took the already weighted carving out of my brief-case, sitting far out to sea off Innsmouth in the launch I had borrowed, that I was first aware of that distant and incredible sound which resembled a voice calling my name, and which seemed to come from below me, rather than from above. And it was this, I am certain, which halted my action long enough for me to look once again, however fleetingly, at the object in my hands before it was flung forth to sink out of sight beneath the gently rolling waters of the Atlantic. But I have no doubt about what I saw, none whatever. *For I held the carving in such a manner that I could not miss the out-flared tentacles of the thing portrayed by that unknown, ancient artist, could not miss seeing that in one of the hitherto empty tentacles there was now clasped the tiny, unclothed figure, perfect in every detail, of a man, whose ascetic features were unmistakably familiar, a miniature of a man which existed in relation to the figure on the carving, in Jason Wecter's own words, recurring with horrible finality there in that boat, "as a seed to a pumpkin"! And even as I flung it forth, it seemed to me that the lips of that miniature man moved in the syllables of my name, and, as it struck the water, and sank below, I seemed to hear that far-away voice like the voice of Jason Wecter, drown my name, horribly gasping and gurgling, with but one syllable enunciated and the other lapped up in the fathomless water off Devil's Reef!*

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 37)

The list of names which has appeared on WEIRD TALES contents pages reads like a roster of those already great or destined to greatness in this particular *genre*: H. P. Lovecraft, August Derleth, E. Hoffman Price, Frank Belknap Long, H. G. Wells, Sax Rohmer, Major George Fielding Elliot, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Carl Jacobi, A. V. Harding, Fritz Leiber, Robert E. Howard, Frank Owen, Clark Ashton Smith, Manly Wade Wellman, Henry E. Whitehead, Earl Pierce, Greye LaSpina, Edmund Hamilton, David H. Keller, Malcolm Jameson, Nictzin Dyalhys, Otis Adelbert Kline —this is but a sampling of the galaxy made at random and from memory, to count them all would be like numbering the Milky Way.

One thing, however, WEIRD TALES writers have in common: ability to tell good stories well. It has been said that "WEIRD TALES prints slick-paper fiction wrapped in pulp." However false or true that estimate may be it is an undisputed fact that more WEIRD TALES writers are "tapped" for inclusion in anthologies than those of any other pulp magazine, that many of its regular contributors are also "names" in the slick-paper field, and that a high percentage of them have had one or more successful books published.

(Continued on page 71)

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The October Game

BY RAY BRADBURY

HE PUT the gun back into the bureau drawer and shut the drawer. No, not that way. Louise wouldn't suffer that way. She would be dead and it would be over and she wouldn't suffer. It was very important that this thing have, above all, duration. Duration through imagination. How to prolong the suffering? How, first of all, to bring it about? Well.

The man standing before the bedroom mirror carefully fitted his cuff links to-

Every October came a sadness that knew no fulfillment until this October . . . .

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

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gether. He paused long enough to hear the children run by swiftly on the street below, outside this warm two-story house; like so many gray mice the children, like so many leaves.

By the sound of the children you knew the calendar day. By their screams you knew what evening it was. You knew it was very late in the year. October. The last day of October, with white bone masks and cut pumpkins and the smell of dropped candle fat.

No. Things hadn't been right for some time. October didn't help any. If anything it made things worse. He adjusted his black bow-tie. If this were spring, he nodded slowly, quietly, emotionlessly, at his image in the mirror, then there might be a chance. But tonight all the world was burning down into ruin. There was no green of spring, none of the freshness, none of the promise.

There was a soft running in the hall. "That's Marion," he told himself. "My little one. All eight quiet years of her. Never a word. Just her luminous gray eyes and her wondering little mouth." His daughter had been in and out all evening, trying on various masks, asking him which was most terrifying, most horrible. They had both finally decided on the skeleton mask. It was "just awful!" It would "scare the beans" from people!

Again he caught the long look of thought and deliberation he gave himself in the mirror. He had never liked October. Ever since he first lay in the autumn leaves before his grandmother's house many years ago and heard the wind and saw the empty trees. It had made him cry, without a reason. And a little of that sadness returned each year to him. It always went away with spring.

But, it was different tonight. There was a feeling of autumn coming to last a million years.

There would be no spring.

He had been crying quietly all evening. It did not show, not a vestige of it, on his face. It was all somewhere hidden, but it wouldn't stop.

A rich syrupy smell of candy filled the bustling house. Louise had laid out apples in new skins of caramel, there were vast bowls of punch fresh-mixed, stringed apples in each door, scooped, vented pumpkins peering triangularly from each cold window. There was a waiting water tub in the center of the living room, waiting, with a sack of apples nearby, for bobbling to begin. All that was needed was the catalyst, the in-pouring of children, to start the apples bobbling, the stringed apples to penduluming in the crowded doors, the candy to vanish, the halls to echo with fright or delight, it was all the same.

Now, the house was silent with preparation. And just a little more than that.

Louise had managed to be in every other room save the room he was in today. It was her very fine way of intimating, Oh look, Mich, see how busy I am! So busy that when you walk into a room *I'm* in there's always something I need to do in *another* room! Just see how I dash about!

For awhile he had played a little game with her, a nasty childish game. When she was in the kitchen then he came to the kitchen, saying, "I need a glass of water." After a moment, him standing, drinking water, she like a crystal witch over the caramel brew bubbling like a prehistoric mudpot on the stove, she said, "Oh, I must light the window pumpkins!" and she rushed to the living room to make the pumpkins smile with light. He came after her, smiling, "I must get my pipe." "Oh, the cider!" she had cried, running to the dining room. "I'll check the cider," he had said. But when he tried following she ran to the bathroom and locked the door.

He stood outside the bath door, laughing strangely and senselessly, his pipe gone cold in his mouth, and then, tired of the game, but stubborn, he waited another five minutes. There was not a sound from the bath. And lest she enjoy in any way knowing that he waited outside, irritated, he suddenly jerked about and walked upstairs, whistling merrily.

AT THE top of the stairs he had waited. Finally he had heard the bath door unlatch and she had come out and life below stairs had resumed, as life in a jungle must resume once a terror has passed on away and the antelope return to their spring.

Now, as he finished his bow-tie and put

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on his dark coat there was a mouse-rustle in the hall. Marion appeared in the door, all skelatinous in her disguise.

"How do I look, Papa?"

"Fine!"

From under the mask, blonde hair showed. From the skull sockets small blue eyes smiled. He sighed. Marion and Louise, the two silent denouncers of his virility, his dark power. What alchemy had there been in Louise that took the dark of a dark man and bleached and bleached the dark brown eyes and black black hair and washed and bleached the ingrown baby all during the period before birth until the child was born, Marion, blonde, blue eyes, ruddy-cheeked. Sometimes he suspected that Louise had conceived the child as an idea, completely a sexual, an immaculate conception of contemptuous mind and cell. As a firm rebuke to him she had produced a child in her *own* image, and, to top it, she had somehow *fixed* the doctor so he shook his head and said, "Sorry, Mr. Wilder, your wife will never have another child. This was the *last* one."

"And I wanted a boy," Mich had said, eight years ago.

He almost bent to take hold of Marion now, in her skull mask. He felt an inexplicable rush of pity for her, because she had never had a father's love, only the crushing, holding love of a loveless mother. But most of all he pitied himself, that somehow he had not made the most of a bad birth, enjoyed his daughter for herself, regardless of her not being dark and a son and like himself. Somewhere he had missed out. Other things being equal, he would have loved the child. But Louise hadn't wanted a child, anyway, in the first place. She had been frightened of the idea of birth. He had forced the child on her, and from that night, all through the year until the agony of the birth itself, Louise had lived in another part of the house. She had expected to die with the forced child. It had been very easy for Louise to hate this husband who so wanted a son that he gave his only wife over to the mortuary.

But—Louise had lived. And in triumph! Her eyes the day he came to the hospital, were cold. I'm alive, they said. And I have a *blonde* daughter! Just look! And when he had put out a hand to touch, the mother had turned away to conspire with her new pink daughter-child—away from that dark forcing murderer. It had all been so beautifully ironic. His selfishness deserved it.

But now it was October again. There had been other Octobers and when he thought of the long winter he had been filled with horror year after year to think of the endless months mortared into the house by an insane fall of snow, trapped with a woman and child, neither of whom loved him, for months on end. During the eight years there had been respites. In spring and summer you got out, walked, picniced; these were desperate solutions to the desperate problem of a hated man.

But, in winter, the hikes and picnics and escapes fell away with the leaves. Life, like a tree, stood empty, the fruit picked, the sap run to earth. Yes, you invited people in, but people were hard to get in winter with blizzards and all. Once he had been clever enough to save for a Florida trip. They had gone south. He had walked in the open.

But now, the eighth winter coming, he knew things were finally at an end. He simply could not wear this one through. There was an acid walled off in him that slowly had eaten through tissue and tissue over the years, and now, tonight, it would reach the wild explosive in him and all would be over!

There was a mad ringing of the bell below. In the hall, Louise went to see. Marion, without a word, ran down to greet the first arrivals. There were shouts and hilarity.

He walked to the top of the stairs.

Louise was below, taking wraps. She was tall and slender and blonde to the point of whiteness, laughing down upon the new children.

He hesitated. What was all this? The years? The boredom of living? Where had it gone wrong? Certainly not with the birth of the child alone. But it had been a symbol of all their tensions, he imagined. His jealousies and his business failures and all the rotten rest of it. Why didn't he just turn, pack a suitcase and leave? No. Not without hurting Louise as much as she had

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hurt him. It was simple as that. Divorce wouldn't hurt her at all. It would simply be an end to numb indecision. If he thought divorce would give her pleasure in any way he would stay married the rest of his life to her, for damned spite. No, he must hurt her. Figure some way, perhaps, to take Marion away from her, legally. Yes. That was it. That would hurt most of all. To take Marion away.

"Hello down there!" He descended the stairs, beaming.

Louise didn't look up.

"Hi, Mr. Wilder!"

The children shouted, waved, as he came down.

BY TEN o'clock the doorbell had stopped ringing, the apples were bitten from stringed doors, the pink child faces were wiped dry from the apple bobbling, napkins were smeared with caramel and punch, and he, the husband, with pleasant efficiency had taken over. He took the party right out of Louise's hands. He ran about talking to the twenty children and the twelve parents who had come and were happy with the special spiked cider he had fixed them. He supervised PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY, SPIN THE BOTTLE, MUSICAL CHAIRS and all the rest, midst fits of shouting laughter. Then, in the triangular-eyed pumpkin shine, all house lights out, he cried, "Hush! Follow me!" he said, tiptoeing toward the cellar.

The parents, on the outer periphery of the costumed riot, commented to each other, nodding at the clever husband, speaking to the lucky wife. How *well* he got on with children, they said.

The children crowded after the husband, squealing.

"The cellar!" he cried. "The tomb of the witch!"

More squealing. He made a mock shiver. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here!"

The parents chuckled.

One by one the children slid down a slide which Mich had fixed up from lengths of table-section, into the dark cellar. He hissed and shouted ghastly utterances after them. A wonderful wailing filled the dark pumpkin-lighted house. Everybody talked at once. Everybody but Marion. She had gone through all the party with a minimum of sound or talk; it was all inside her, all the excitement and joy. What a little troll, he thought. With a shut mouth and shiny eyes she had watched her own party, like so many serpentines, thrown before her.

Now, the parents. With laughing reluctance they slid down the short incline, uproarious, while little Marion stood by, always wanting to see it all, to be last. Louise went down without his help. He moved to aid her, but she was gone even before he bent.

The upper house was empty and silent in the candleshine.

Marion stood by the slide. "Here we go," he said, and picked her up.

THEY sat in a vast circle in the cellar. Warmth came from the distant bulk of the furnace. The chairs stood in a long line down each wall, twenty squealing children, twelve rustling relatives, alternately spaced, with Louise down at the far end, Mich up at this end, near the stairs. He peered but saw nothing. They had all groped to their chairs, catch-as-you-can in the blackness. The entire program from here on was to be enacted in the dark, he as Mr. Interlocutor. There was a child scampering, a smell of damp cement, and the sound of the wind out in the October stars.

"Now!" cried the husband in the dark cellar. "Quiet!"

Everybody settled.

The room was black black. Not a light, not a shine, not a glint of an eye.

A scraping of crockery, a metal rattle.

"The witch is dead," intoned the husband.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeee," said the children.

"The witch is dead, she has been killed, and here is the knife she was killed with."

He handed over the knife. It was passed from hand to hand, down and around the circle, with chuckles and little odd cries and comments from the adults.

"The witch is dead, and this is her head," whispered the husband, and handed an item to the nearest person.

"Oh, I know how this game is played," some child cried, happily, in the dark. "He

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gets some old chicken innards from the icebox and hands them around and says, 'These are her innards!' And he makes a clay head and passes it for her head, and passes a soup-bone for her arm. And he takes a marble and says 'This is her eye!' And he takes some corn and says 'This is her teeth!' And he takes a sack of plum pudding and gives that and says, 'This is her stomach!' I know how *this* is played!"

"Hush, you'll spoil everything," some girl said.

"The witch came to harm, and this is her arm," said Mich.

"Eeeee!"

The items were passed and passed, like hot potatoes, around the circle. Some children screamed, wouldn't touch them. Some ran from their chairs to stand in the center of the cellar until the grisly items had passed.

"Aw, it's only chicken insides," scoffed a boy. "Come back, Helen!"

Shot from hand to hand, with small scream after scream, the items went down the line, down, down, to be followed by another and another.

"The witch cut apart, and this is her heart," said the husband.

Six or seven items moving at once through the laughing, trembling dark.

LOUISE spoke up. "Marion don't be afraid; it's only play."

Marion didn't say anything.

"Marion?" asked Louise. "Are you afraid?"

Marion didn't speak.

"She's all right," said the husband. "She's not afraid."

On and on the passing, the screams, the hilarity.

The autumn wind sighed about the house. And he, the husband, stood at the head of the dark cellar, intoning the words, handing out the items.

"Marion?" asked Louise again, from far across the cellar.

Everybody was talking.

"Marion?" called Louise.

Everybody quieted.

"Marion, answer me, are you afraid?"

Marion didn't answer.

The husband stood there, at the bottom of the cellar steps.

Louise called, "Marion, are you there?"

No answer. The room was silent.

"Where's Marion?" called Louise.

"She was here," said a boy.

"Maybe she's upstairs."

"Marion!"

No answer. It was quiet.

Louise cried out, "Marion, Marion!"

"Turn on the lights," said one of the adults.

The items stopped passing. The children and adults sat with the witches' items in their hands.

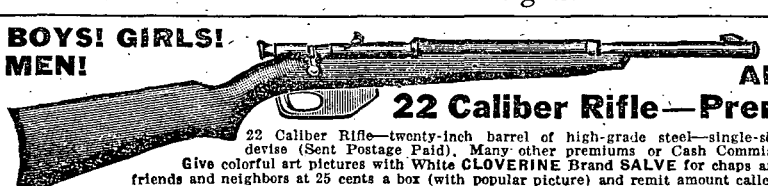
"No." Louise gasped. There was a scraping of her chair, wildly, in the dark. "No. Don't turn on the lights, don't turn on the lights, oh God, God, God, don't turn them on, please, please *don't* turn on the lights, *don't!*" Louise was shrieking now. The entire cellar froze with the scream.

Nobody moved.

Everyone sat in the dark cellar, suspended in the suddenly frozen task of this October game; the wind blew outside, banging the house, the smell of pumpkins and apples filled the room with the smell of the objects in their fingers while one boy cried, "I'll go upstairs and look!" and he ran upstairs hopefully and out around the house, four times around the house, calling, "Marion, Marion, Marion!" over and over and at last coming slowly down the stairs into the waiting, breathing cellar and saying to the darkness, "I can't find her."

Then . . . some idiot turned on the lights.

BOYS! GIRLS! MEN!



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Catnip

BY ROBERT BLOCH

I

RONNIE SHIRES stood before the mirror and slicked back his curly hair. He straightened his new sweater and stuck out his chest. Not bad! Had to watch the way he looked, with graduation only two weeks away and that election for class president coming up. If he could get to be class president, then next year, in high school, he'd swing a little weight maybe. Go out for second team or something. But he had to look sharp—

"Ronnie! Better hurry or you'll be late!"

Ma came out of the kitchen, carrying his lunch. Ronnie wiped the smile off his face. She walked up behind him and put her arms around his waist.

"Darling—I only wish your father were here to see you—"

Ronnie wriggled free. "Yeah, sure. Say, Ma."

"Yes?"

"How's about letting me have another buck, huh? I got to get some things today."

The old woman and the cat, they were both ageless, both evil

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

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"Well, I suppose. But try to make it last, son. This graduation costs a lot of money, seems to me."

"I'll make it up to you some day, Ma." He watched her as she fumbled in her apron pocket and produced a wadded dollar bill.

"Thanks. Be seeing you." He picked up his lunch and ran outside. He walked along, smiling and whistling, knowing Ma was watching him from the window.

Then he turned the corner, halted under a tree, and fished out a cigarette. He lit it and sauntered slowly across the street, puffing deeply. Out of the corner of his eye he watched the Ogden house just ahead.

Sure enough, the front screen door banged and Marvin Ogden came down the steps. Marvin was fifteen, one year older than Ronnie, but smaller and skinnier. He wore glasses and stuttered when he got excited, but he was valedictorian of the graduating class.

Ronnie came up behind him, walking fast.

"Hello, Snot-face!"

Marvin wheeled. He avoided Ronnie's glare, but smiled weakly at the pavement.

"I said hello, Snot-face! What's the matter, don't you know your own name, jerk?"

"Hello—Ronnie."

"How's old Snot-face today?"

"Aw, gee, Ronnie. Why do you have to talk like that? I never did anything to you, did I?"

Ronnie spit in the direction of Marvin's shoes. "I'd like to see you just try doing something to me, you four-eyed little—"

Marvin began to walk away, but Ronnie kept pace.

"Slow down, jag. I wanna talk to you."

"Wh-what is it, Ronnie? I don't want to be late."

"Shut your yap."

"But—"

"Listen, you. What was the big idea in History exam yesterday when you pulled your paper away?"

"You know, Ronnie. You aren't supposed to copy somebody else's answers."

"You trying to tell me what to do, you sucker?"

"N-no. I mean, I only want to keep you out of trouble. What if Miss Sanders found out, and you want to be elected class president? Why, if anybody knew—"

Ronnie put his hand on Marvin's shoulder. He smiled. "You wouldn't ever tell her about it, would you, Snot-face?" he murmured.

"Of course not! Cross my heart!"

Ronnie continued to smile. He dug his fingers into Marvin's shoulder. With his other hand he swept Marvin's books to the ground. As Marvin bent forward to pick them up, he kicked Marvin as hard as he could, bringing his knee up fast. Marvin sprawled on the sidewalk. He began to cry. Ronnie watched him as he attempted to rise.

"This is just a sample of what you got coming if you squeal," he said. He stepped on the fingers of Marvin's left hand. "Sucker!"

MARVIN'S snivelling faded from his ears as he turned the corner at the end of the block. Mary June was waiting for him under the trees. He came up behind her and slapped her, hard.

"Hello, you!" he said.

Mary June jumped about a foot, her curls bouncing on her shoulders. Then she turned and saw who it was.

"Oh, Ronnie! You oughtn't to—"

"Shut up. I'm in a hurry. Can't be late the day before election. You lining up the girls?"

"Sure, Ronnie. You know, I promised. I had Ellen and Vicky over at the house last night and they said they'd vote for you for sure. All the girls are gonna vote for you."

"Well, they better." Ronnie threw his cigarette butt against a rose-bush in the Elsner's yard.

"Ronnie—you be careful—want to start a fire?"

"Quit bossing me." He scowled.

"I'm not trying to boss you, Ronnie. Only—"

"Aw, you make me sick!" He quickened his pace, and the girl bit her lip as she endeavored to keep step with him. "Ronnie, wait for me!"

"Wait for me!" He mocked her. "What's the matter, you afraid you'll get lost or something?"

"No. *You* know. I don't like to pass that old Mrs. Mingle's place. She always stares at me and makes faces."

"She's nuts!"

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"I'm scared of her, Ronnie. Aren't you?"

"Me scared of that old bat? She can go take a flying leap!"

"Don't talk so loud, she'll hear you."

"Who cares?"

Ronnie marched boldly past the tree-shadowed cottage behind the rusted iron fence. He stared insolently at the girl, who made herself small against his shoulder, eyes averted from the ramshackle edifice. He deliberately slackened his pace as they passed the cottage, with its boarded-up windows, screened-in porch and general air of withdrawal from the world.

Mrs. Mingle herself was not in evidence today. Usually she could be seen in the weed-infested garden at the side of the cottage; a tiny, dried-up old woman, bending over her vines and plants, mumbling incessantly to herself or to the raddled black tomcat which served as her constant companion.

"Old prune-face ain't around!" Ronnie observed, loudly. "Must be off some place on her broomstick."

"Ronnie—please!"

"Who cares?" Ronnie pulled Mary June's curls. "You dames are scared of everything, ain't you?"

"*Aren't,* Ronnie."

"Don't tell *me* how to talk!" Ronnie's gaze shifted again to the silent house, huddled in the shadows. A segment of shadow at the side of the cottage seemed to be moving. A black blur detached itself from the end of the porch. Ronnie recognized Mrs. Mingle's cat. It minced down the path towards the gate.

Quickly, Ronnie stooped and found a rock. He grasped it, rose, aimed, and hurled the missile in one continuous movement.

The cat hissed, then squawled in pain as the rock grazed its ribs.

"Oh, Ronnie!"

"Come on, let's run before she sees us!"

They flew down the street. The school bell drowned out the cat-yowl.

"Here we go," said Ronnie. "You do my homework for me? Good. Give it here once."

He snatched the papers from Mary June's hand and sprinted ahead. The girl stood watching him, smiling her admiration. From behind the fence the cat watched, too, and licked its jaws.

II

IT HAPPENED that afternoon, after school. Ronnie and Joe Gordan and Seymour Higgins were futzing around with a baseball and he was talking about the outfit Ma promised to buy him this summer if the dressmaking business picked up. Only he made it sound like he was getting the outfit for sure, and that they could all use the mask and mitt. It didn't hurt to build it up a little, with election tomorrow. He had to stand in good with the whole gang.

He knew if he hung around the schoolyard much longer, Mary June would come out and want him to walk her home. He was sick of her. Oh, she was all right for homework and such stuff, but these guys would just laugh at him if he went off with a dame.

So he said how about going down the street to in front of the pool hall and maybe hang around to see if somebody would shoot a game? He'd pay. Besides, they could smoke.

Ronnie knew that these guys didn't smoke, but it sounded bigshot and that's what he wanted. They all followed him down the street, pounding their cleats on the sidewalk. It made a lot of noise, because everything was so quiet.

All Ronnie could hear was the cat. They were passing Mrs. Mingle's and there was this cat, rolling around in the garden on its back and on its stomach, playing with some kind of ball. It purred and meeowed and whined.

"Look!" yelled Joe Gordan. "Dizzy cat's havin' a fit 'r something, huh?"

"Lice," said Ronnie. "Damned mangy old thing's fulla lice and fleas and stuff. I socked it a good one this morning."

"Ya did?"

"Sure. With a rock. This big, too." He made a watermelon with his hands.

"Weren't you afraid of old lady Mingle?"

"Afraid? Why, that dried-up old—"

"Catnip," said Seymour Higgins. "That's what she's got. Ball of catnip. Old Mingle buys it for her. My old man says she buys everything for that cat; special food and sardines. Treats it like a baby. Ever see them walk down the street together?"

"Catnip, huh?" Joe peered through the fence. "Wonder why they like it so much.

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Gets 'em wild, doesn't it? Cats'll do anything for catnip."

The cat squealed, sniffing and clawing at the ball. Ronnie scowled at it. "I hate cats. Somebody oughta drowned that damn thing."

"Better not let Mrs. Mingle hear you talk like that," Seymour cautioned. "She'll put the evil eye on you."

"Bull!"

"Well, she grows them herbs and stuff and my old lady says—"

"Bull!"

"All right. But I wouldn't go monkeying around her or her old cat, either."

"I'll show you."

Before he knew it, Ronnie was opening the gate. He advanced toward the black tomcat as the boys gaped.

The cat crouched over the catnip, eyes flattened against a velveteen skull. Ronnie hesitated a moment, gauging the glitter of claws, the glare of agate eyes. But the gang was watching—

"Scat!" he shouted. He advanced, waving his arms. The cat sidled backwards. Ronnie feinted with his hand and scooped up the catnip ball.

"See? I got it, you guys. I got—"

"Put that down!"

He didn't see the door open. He didn't see her walk down the steps. But suddenly she was there. Leaning on her cane, wearing a black dress that fitted tightly over her tiny frame, she seemed hardly any bigger than the cat which crouched at her side. Her hair was gray and wrinkled and dead, her face was gray and wrinkled and dead, but her eyes—

They were agate eyes, like the cat's. They glowed. And when she talked, she spit the way the cat did.

"Put that down, young man!"

Ronnie began to shake. It was only a chill, everybody gets chills now and then, and could he help it if he shook so hard the catnip just fell out of his hand?

He wasn't scared. He had to show the gang he wasn't scared of this skinny little dried-up old woman. It was hard to breathe, he was shaking so, but he managed. He filled his lungs and opened his mouth.

"You—you old witch!" he yelled.

The agate eyes widened. They were bigger than she was. All he could see were the eyes. Witch eyes. Now that he said it, he knew it was true. Witch. She was a witch.

"You insolent puppy. I've a good mind to cut out your lying tongue!"

Geez, she wasn't kidding!

Now she was coming closer, and the cat was inching up on him, and then she raised the cane in the air, she was going to hit him, the witch was after him, oh Ma, no, don't, oh—

Ronnie ran.

III

COULD he help it? Geez, the guys ran too. They'd run before he did, even. He had to run, the old bat was crazy, anybody could see that. Besides, if he'd stayed she'd of tried to hit him and maybe he'd let her have it. He was only trying to keep out of trouble. That was all.

Ronnie told it to himself over and over at supper time. But that didn't do any good, telling it to himself. It was the guys he had to tell it to, and fast. He had to explain it before election tomorrow—

"Ronnie. What's the matter? You sick?"

"No, Ma."

"Then why don't you answer a person? I declare, you haven't said ten words since you came in the house. And you aren't eating your supper."

"Not hungry."

"Something bothering you, son?"

"No. Leave me alone."

"It's that election tomorrow, isn't it?"

"Leave me alone." Ronnie rose. "I'm goin' out."

"Ronnie!"

"I got to see Joe. Important."

"Back by nine, remember."

"Yeah. Sure."

He went outside. The night was cool. Windy for this time of year. Ronnie shivered a little as he turned the corner. Maybe a cigarette—

He lit a match and a shower of sparks spiralled to the sky. Ronnie began to walk, puffing nervously. He had to see Joe and the others and explain. Yeah, right now, too. If they told anybody else—

It was dark. The light on the corner was out, and Ogdens weren't home. That made

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it darker, because Mrs. Mingle never showed a light in her cottage.

Mrs. Mingle. Her cottage was up ahead. He'd better cross the street.

What was the matter with him? Was he getting chicken-guts? Afraid of that damned old woman, that old witch! He puffed, gulped, expanded his chest. Just let her try anything. Just let her be hiding under the trees waiting to grab out at him with her big claws and hiss—what was he talking about, anyway? That was the cat. Nuts to her cat, and her too. He'd show them!

Ronnie walked past the dark shadow where Mrs. Mingle dwelt. He whistled defiance, and emphasized it by shooting his cigarette butt across the fence. Sparks flew and were swallow by the mouth of the night.

Ronnie paused and peered over the fence. Everything was black and still. There was nothing to be afraid of. Everything was black—

Everything except that flicker. It came from up the path, under the porch. He could see the porch now because there was a light. Not a steady light; a wavering light. Like a fire. A fire—where his cigarette had landed! The cottage was beginning to burn!

Ronnie gulped and clung to the fence. Yes, it was on fire, all right. Mrs. Mingle would come out and the firemen would come and they'd find the butt and see him and then—

He fled down the street. The wind cat-howled behind him, the wind that fanned the flames that burned the cottage—

Ma was in bed. He managed to slow down and walk softly as he slipped into the house, up the stairs. He undressed in the dark and sought sanctuary between the bedsheets. When he got the covers over his head he had another chill. Lying there, trembling, not daring to look out of the window and see the glare from the other side of the block, Ronnie's teeth chattered. He knew he was going to pass out in a minute.

Then he heard the screaming from far away. Fire engines. Somebody had called them. He needn't worry now. Why should the sound frighten him? It was only a siren, it wasn't Mrs. Mingle screaming, it couldn't be. She was all right. He was all right. Nobody knew . . .

Ronnie fell asleep with the wind and the siren wailing in his ears. His slumber was deep and only once was there an interruption. That was along towards morning, when he thought he heard a noise at the window. It was a scraping sound. The wind, of course. And it must have been the wind, too, that sobbed and whined and whimpered beneath the window-sill at dawn. It was only Ronnie's imagination, Ronnie's conscience, that transformed the sound into the wailing of a cat. . . .

IV

"RONNIE!"

It wasn't the wind, it wasn't a cat. Ma was calling him.

"Ronnie! Oh, Ronnie!"

He opened his eyes, shielding them from the sunshafts.

"I declare, you might answer a person." He heard her grumbling to herself downstairs. Then she called again.

"Ronnie!"

"I'm coming, Ma."

He got out of bed, went to the bathroom, and dressed. She was waiting for him in the kitchen.

"Land sakes, you sure slept sound last night. Didn't you hear the fire engines?"

Ronnie dropped a slice of toast. "What engines?"

Ma's voice rose. "Don't you know? Why, boy, it was just awful—Mrs. Mingle's cottage burned down."

"Yeah?" He had trouble picking up the toast again.

"The poor old lady—just think of it—trapped in there—"

He had to shut her up. He couldn't stand what was coming next. But what could he say, how could he stop her?

"Burned alive. The whole place was on fire when they got there. The Ogdens saw it when they came home and Mr. Ogden called the firemen, but it was too late. When I think of that old lady it just makes me—"

Without a word, Ronnie rose from the table and left the room. He didn't wait for his lunch. He didn't bother to examine himself in the mirror. He went outside, before he cried, or screamed, or hauled off and hit Ma in the puss.

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The puss—

It was waiting for him on the front walk. The black bundle with the agate eyes. The cat. Mrs. Mingle's cat, waiting for him to come out.

Ronnie took a deep breath before he opened the gate. The cat didn't make a sound, didn't stir. It just hunched up on the sidewalk and stared at him.

He watched it for a moment, then cast about for a stick. There was a hunk of lathe near the porch. He picked it up and swung it. Then he opened the gate.

"Scat!" he said.

The cat retreated. Ronnie walked away. The cat moved after him. Ronnie wheeled, brandishing the stick.

"Scram, before I let you have it!"

The cat stood still. Ronnie stared at it. Why hadn't the damn' thing burned up in the fire? And what was it doing here?

He gripped the lathe. It felt good between his fingers, splinters and all. Just let that mangy tom start anything—

He walked along, not looking back. What was the matter with him? Suppose the cat did follow him. It couldn't hurt him any. Neither could old Mingle. She was dead. The dirty witch. Talking about cutting his tongue out. Well, she got what was coming to her, all right. Too bad her scroungy cat was still around. If it didn't watch out, he'd fix it, too. He should worry now.

Nobody was going to find out about that cigarette. Mrs. Mingle was dead. He ought to be glad, everything was all right, sure, he felt great.

The shadow followed him down the street.

"Get out of here!"

Ronnie turned and heaved the lathe at the cat. It hissed. Ronnie heard the wind hiss, heard his cigarette butt hiss, heard Mrs. Mingle hiss.

He began to run. The cat ran after him.

"Hey, Ronnie!"

Marvin Ogden was calling him. He couldn't stop now, not even to hit the punk. He ran on. The cat kept pace.

Then he was winded and he slowed down. It was just in time, too. Up ahead was a crowd of kids, standing on the sidewalk in front of a heap of charred, smoking boards.

They were looking at Mingle's cottage—

Ronnie closed his eyes and darted back up the street. The cat followed.

HE HAD to get rid of it before he went to school. What if people saw him with her cat? Maybe they'd start to talk. He had to get rid of it—

Ronnie ran clear down to Sinclair Street. The cat was right behind him. On the corner he picked up a stone and let fly. The cat dodged. Then it sat down on the sidewalk and looked at him. Just looked.

Ronnie couldn't take his eyes off the cat. It stared so. Mrs. Mingle had stared, too. But she was dead. And this was only a cat. A cat he had to get away from, fast.

The street car came down Sinclair Street. Ronnie found a dime in his pocket and boarded the car. The cat didn't move. He stood on the platform as the car pulled away and looked back at the cat. It just sat there.

Ronnie rode around the loop, then transferred to the Hollis Avenue car. It brought him over to the school, ten minutes late. He got off and started to hurry across the street.

A shadow crossed the entrance to the building.

Ronnie saw the cat. It squatted there, waiting.

He ran.

That's all Ronnie remembered of the rest of the morning. He ran. He ran, and the cat followed. He couldn't go to school, he couldn't be there for the election, he couldn't get rid of the cat. He ran.

Up and down the streets, back and forth, all over the whole neighborhood; stopping and dodging and throwing stones and swearing and panting and sweating. But always the running, and always the cat right behind him.

Once it started to chase him and before he knew it he was heading straight for the place where the burned smell filled the air, straight for the ruins of Mrs. Mingle's cottage. The cat wanted him to go there, wanted him to see—

Ronnie began to cry. He sobbed and panted all the way home. The cat didn't make a sound. It followed him. All right, let it. He'd fix it. He'd tell Ma. Ma would get rid of it for him. Ma.

"Ma!"

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He yelled as he ran up the steps.

No answer. She was out. Marketing.

And the cat crept up the steps behind him.

Ronnie slammed the door, locked it. Ma had her key. He was safe now. Safe at home. Safe in bed—he wanted to go to bed and pull the covers over his head, wait for Ma to come and make everything all right.

There was a scratching at the door.

"Ma!" His scream echoed through the empty house.

He ran upstairs. The scratching died away.

And then he heard the footsteps on the porch, the slow footsteps; he heard the rattling and turning of the doorknob. It was old lady Mingle, coming from the grave. It was the witch, coming to get him. It was—

"Ma!"

"Ronnie, what's the matter? What you doing home from school?"

He heard her. It was all right. Just in time, Ronnie closed his mouth. He couldn't tell her about the cat. He mustn't ever tell her. Then everything would come out. He had to be careful what he said.

"I got sick to my stomach," he said. "Miss Sanders said I should come home and lay down."

Ronnie lay in bed and dozed as the afternoon shadows ran in long black ribbons across the bedroom floor. He smiled to himself. What a sucker he was! Afraid of a cat. Maybe there wasn't even a cat—all in his mind. Dope!

"Ronnie—you all right?" Ma called up from the foot of the stairs.

"Yes, Ma. I feel lots better."

Sure, he felt better. He could get up now and eat supper if he wanted. In just a minute he'd put his clothes on and go downstairs. He started to push the sheets off. It was dark in the room, now. Just about supper-time—

THEN Ronnie heard it. A scratching. A scurring. From the hall? No. It couldn't be in the hall. Then where?

The window. It was open. And the scratching came from the ledge outside. He had to close it, fast. Ronnie jumped out of bed, barking his shin against a chair as he groped through the dusk. Then he was at the window, slamming it down, tight.

He heard the scratching.

And it came from *inside the room!*

Ronnie hurled himself upon the bed, clawing the covers up to his chin. His eyes bulged against the darkness.

Where was it?

He saw nothing but shadows. Which shadow moved?

Where was it?

Ronnie didn't know. All he knew was that he lay in bed, waiting, thinking of Mrs. Mingle and her cat and how she was a witch and died because he'd killed her. Or had he killed her? He was all mixed up, he couldn't remember, he didn't know what was real and what wasn't real any more. He couldn't tell which shadow would move next.

And then he could.

The round shadow was moving. The round black ball was inching across the floor from beneath the window. It was the cat, all right, because shadows don't have claws that scrape. Shadows don't leap through the air and perch on the bedpost, grinning at you with yellow eyes and yellow teeth . . . *grinning the way Mrs. Mingle grinned.*

The cat was big. Its eyes were big. Its teeth were big. It crouched there, hunching to spring.

Ronnie opened his mouth to scream.

Then the shadow was sailing through the air, coming at him, at his face, at his open mouth. The claws were fastened in his cheeks, forcing his jaws apart. And the head dipped—

Far away, under the pain, somebody was calling.

"Ronnie! Oh, Ronnie!"

Everything was fire. Ronnie lashed out, and suddenly the shadow went away.

"Ronnie! What's the matter with you?"

He sat bolt upright in the bed. His mouth worked, and he opened it to scream, but no sound came out. Nothing came out except that gushing red wetness.

"Ronnie! Why don't you answer me?"

A horrible guttural sound came from deep within Ronnie's throat. But no words. There never would be any words.

"Ronnie—what's the matter? *Has the cat got your tongue?"*

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The Master of the Crabs

BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Strange books, they were, containing the erudition of buried aeons

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

I REMEMBER that I grumbled a little when Mior Lumivix awakened me. The past evening had been a tedious one with its unpleasant familiar vigil, during which I had nodded often. From sunfall till the setting of Scorpio, which occurred well after midnight at that season, it had been my duty to tend the gradual inspissation of a decoction of scarabs, much favored by Mior Lumivix in the compound of his most re-

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quested love-potions. He had warned me often that this liquor must be thickened neither too slowly nor too rapidly, by maintaining an even fire in the athanor, and had cursed me more than once for spoiling it. Therefore, I did not yield to my drowsiness till the decoction was safely decanted and strained thrice through the sieve of perforated shark-skin.

Taciturn beyond his wont, the Master had retired early to his chamber. I knew that something troubled him; but was too tired for overmuch conjecture, and had not dared to question him.

It seemed that I had not slept for more than the period of a few pulsebeats—and here was the Master thrusting the yellow-slotted eye of his lantern into my face and dragging me from the pallet. I knew that I should not sleep again that night; for the Master wore his one-horned hat, and his cloak was girdled tightly about him, with the ancient arthame depending from the girdle in its shagreen sheeth that time and the hands of many magicians had blackened.

"Abortion fathered by a sloth!" he cried. "Suckling of a sow that has eaten mandragora! Would you slumber till doomsday? We must hurry: I have learned that Sarcand has procured the chart of Omvor and has gone forth alone to the wharves. No doubt he means to embark in quest of the temple-treasure. We must follow quickly for much time has already been lost."

I rose now without further demur and dressed myself expeditiously, knowing well the urgency of this matter. Sarcand, who had but lately come to the city of Mirouane, had already made himself the most formidable of all my master's competitors. It was said that he was native to Naat, amid the sombre western ocean, having been begotten by a sorcerer of that isle on a woman of the black cannibals who dwell beyond its middle mountains. He combined his mother's savage nature with the dark necromantic craft of his father; and, moreover, had acquired much dubious knowledge and repute in his travels through orient kingdoms before settling in Mirouane.

The fabulous chart of Omvor, dating from lost ages, was a thing that many generations of wizards had dreamt to find. Omvor, an ancient pirate still renowned, had performed successfully a feat of impious rashness. Sailing up a closely guarded estuary by night with his small crew disguised as priests in stolen temple-barges, he had looted the fane of the Moon-God in Faraad and had carried away many of its virgins, together with gems, gold, altar-vessels, talismans, phylacteries and books of eldritch elder magic. These books were the gravest loss of all, since even the priests had never dared to copy them. They were unique and irreplaceable, containing the erudition of buried aeons.

Omvor's feat had given rise to many legends. He and his crew and the ravished virgins, in two small brigantines, had vanished ultimately amid the western seas. It was believed that they had been caught by the Black River, that terrible ocean-stream which pours with an irresistible swiftening beyond Naat to the world's end. But before that final voyage, Omvor had lightened his vessels of the looted treasure and had made a chart on which the location of its hiding-place was indicated. This chart he had given to a former comrade who had grown too old for voyaging.

No man had ever found the treasure. But it was said that the chart still existed throughout the centuries, hidden somewhere no less securely than the loot of the Moon-God's temple. Of late there were rumors that some sailor, inheriting it from his fathers, had brought the map to Mirouane. Mior Lumivix, through agents both human and preterhuman, had tried vainly to trace the sailor; knowing that Sarcand and the other wizards of the city were also seeking him.

THIS much was known to me; and the Master told me more while, at his bidding, I collected hastily such provisions as were needed for a voyage of several days.

"I had watched Sarcand like an osprey watching its nest," he said. "My familiars found me that he had found the chart's owner, and had hired some thief to steal it; but they could tell me little else. Even the eyes of my devil-cat, peering through his windows, were baffled by the cuttle-fish darkness with which his magic surrounds him at will.

"Tonight I did a dangerous thing, since

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there was no other way. Drinking the juice of the purple *dedaim,* which induces profound trance, I projected my ka into his elemental-guarded chamber. The elementals knew my presence, they gathered about me in shapes of fire and shadow, menacing me unspeakably. They opposed me, they drove me forth . . . but I had seen—enough."

The Master paused, bidding me gird myself with a consecrated magic sword, similar to his own but of less antiquity, which he had never before allowed me to wear. By this time I had gathered together the required provision of food and drink, storing it in a strong fish-net that I could carry easily over my shoulder by the handle. The net was one that was used mainly for catching certain sea-reptiles, from which Mior Lumivix extracted a venom possessing unique virtue.

It was not till we had locked all the portals, and had plunged into the dark seaward-winding streets, that the Master resumed his account:

"A man was leaving Sarcand's chamber at the moment of my entrance. I saw him briefly, ere the black arras parted and closed; but I shall know him again. He was young and plump, with powerful sinews under the plumpness, with slanted squinting eyes in a girlish face and the swart yellow skin of a man from the southern isles. He wore the short breeks and ankle-topping boots of a mariner, being otherwise naked.

"Sarcand was sitting with his back half-turned, holding an unrolled sheet of papyrus, yellow as the salior's face, to that evil, four-horned lamp which he feeds with cobras' oil. The lamp glared like a ghoul's eye. But I looked over his shoulder . . . long enough . . . before his demons could hurry me from the room. The papyrus was indeed the chart of Omvor. It was stiff with age, and stained with blood and sea-water. But its title and purpose and appellations were still legible, though inscribed in an archaic script that few can read nowadays.

"It showed the western shore of the continent Zothique, and the seas beyond. An isle lying due westward from Mirouane was indicated as the burial-place of the treasure. It was named the Island of Crabs on the chart: but plainly it is none other than the one now called Iribos which, though seldom visited, lies at a distance of only two days' voyaging. There are no other islands within a hundred leagues, either north or south, excepting a few desolate rocks and small atolls."

Urging me to greater haste, Mior Lumivix continued:

"I woke too tardily from the swoon by the *dedaim.* A lesser adept would never have awakened at all.

"My familiars warned me that Sarcand had left his house a full hour ago. He was prepared for a journey, and went wharfward. But we will overtake him. I think that he will go without companions to Iribos, desiring to keep the treasure wholly secret. He is indeed strong and terrible, but his demons are of a kind that cannot cross water, being entirely earthbound. He has left them behind with the moiety of his magic. Have no fear for the outcome."

THE wharves were still and almost deserted, except for a few sleeping sailors who had succumbed to the rank wine and arrack of the taverns. Under the late moon, that had curved and sharpened to a slim simitar, we unmoored our boat and pushed away, the Master holding the tiller, while I bent my shoulders to the broad-bladed oars. Thus we threaded the huddled maze of far-gathered ships, of xebecs and galleys, of river-barges and scows and feluccas, that thronged that immemorial harbor. The sluggish air, hardly stirring our tall lateen sail, was pregnant with sea-smells, with the reek of laden fishing-boats and the spices of exotic cargoes. None hailed us; and we heard only the calling of watchmen on shadowy decks, proclaiming the hour in outlandish tongues.

Our boat, though small and open, was stoutly built of orient beef-wood. Sharply prowed and deeply keeled, with high bulwarks, it had proven itself seaworthy even in tempests such as were not to be apprehended at this season.

Blowing over Mirouane, from fields and orchards and desert kingdoms, a wind freshened behind us as we cleared the harbor. It stiffened, till the sail bellied like a dragon's wing. The furrows of foam curved high beside our sharp prow, as we followed Capricornus down the west.

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Far out on the waters before us, in the dim moonlight, something seemed to move, to dance and waver like a phantom. Perhaps it was Sarcand's boat . . . or another's. Doubtless, the Master also saw it; but he said only:

"You may sleep now."

So I, Manthar the apprentice, composed myself to slumber, while Mior Lumivix steered on, and the starry hooves and horns of the Goat sank seaward.

The sun was high above our stern when I awakened. The wind still blew, strong and favorable, driving us into the west with unabated speed. We had passed beyond sight of the shore-line of Zothique. The sky was void of clouds, the sea vacant of any sail, unrolling before us like a vast scroll of sombre azure, lined only with the shifting and fading foam-crests.

The day went by, ebbing beyond the still-empty horizon; and night overtook us like the heaven-blotting purple sail of a god, sewn with the Signs and planets. The night too went over, and a second dawn.

All this time, without sleeping, the Master had steered the boat, with eyes peering implacably westward like those of an ocean-hawk; and I wondered greatly at his endurance. Now for awhile he slept, sitting upright at the helm. But it seemed that his eyes were still vigilant behind their lids; and his hand still held the rudder straight, without slackening.

In a few hours the Master opened his eyes; but hardly stirred from the posture he maintained throughout.

He had spoken little during our voyage. I did not question him, knowing that he would tell me whatever was needful at the due time. But I was full of curiosities; and was not without fear and doubt regarding Sarcand, whose rumored necromancies might well have dismayed others than a mere novice. I could surmise nothing of the Master's thoughts, except that they concerned dark and esoteric matters.

Having slept for the third time since our embarkment, I was roused by the Master crying loudly. In the dimness of the third dawn, an island towered before us, impending with jagged cliffs and jutting crags, and barring the sea for several leagues to northward and southward. It was shaped somewhat like a monster, facing north. Its head was a high-horned promontory, dipping a great griffin-like beak in the ocean.

"This is Iribos," the Master told me. "The sea is strong about it, with strange tides and perilous currents. There are no landing places on this side, and we must not venture too close. We must round the northern headland. There is a small cove amid the western cliffs, entered only through a sea-cavern. It is there that the treasure lies."

WE TACKED northward slowly and deviously against the wind, at a distance of three or four bow-shots from the island. All our sea-craft was required to make progress: for the wind strengthened wildly, as if swollen by the breath of devils. Above its howling we heard the surf's clamor upon those monstrous rocks that rose bare and gaunt from cerements of foam.

"The isle is unpeopled," said Mior Lumivix. "It is shunned by sailors and even by the sea-fowl. Men say that the curse of the maritime gods was laid upon it long ago, forbidding it to any but the creatures of the submarine deep. Its coves and caverns are haunted by crabs and octopi . . . and perhaps by stranger things."

We sailed on in a tedious serpentine course, beaten back at times or born perilously shoreward by the shifting gusts that opposed us like evil demons. The sun climbed in the orient, shining starkly down on the desolation of crags and scarps that was Iribos. Still we tacked and veered; and I seemed to sense the beginning of a strange unease in the Master. But of this, if such there was, his manner betrayed no sign.

It was almost noon when we rounded at last the long beak of the northern promontory. There, when we turned southerly, the wind fell in a weird stillness, and the sea was miraculously calmed as if by wizard oils. Our sail hung limp and useless above mirror-like waters, in which it seemed that the boats' reflected image and ours, unbroken, moveless, might float forever amid the unchanging reflection of the monster-shapen isle. We both began to ply the oars; but even thus the boat crawled with a singular slowness.

I observed the isle strictly as we passed along, noting several inlets where, to all ap-

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pearance, a vessel could have landed readily.

"There is much danger here," said Mior Lumivix, without elucidating his statement.

Again, as we continued, the cliffs became a wall that was broken only by rifts and chasms. They were crowned in places by a sparse, funereal-colored vegetation that hardly served to soften their formidable aspect. High up in the clefted rocks, where it seemed that no natural tide or tempest could have flung them, I observed the scattered spars and timbers of antique vessels.

"Row closer," enjoined the Master. "We are nearing the cavern that leads to the hidden inlet."

Even as we veered landward through the crystalline calm, there was a sudden seething and riffling about us, as if some monster had risen beneath. The boat began to shoot with plummet-like speed toward the cliffs, the sea foaming and streaming all around as though some kraken were dragging us to its caverned lair. Borne like a leaf on a cataract, we toiled vainly with straining oars against the ineluctable current.

Heaving higher momentarily, the cliffs seemed to shear the heavens above us, unscalable, without ledge or foothold. Then, in the sheer wall, appeared the low, broad arch of a cavern-mouth that we had not discerned heretofore, toward which the boat was drawn with dreadful swiftness.

"It is the entrance!" cried the Master. "But some wizard tide has flooded it."

We shipped our useless oars and crouched down behind the thwarts as we neared the opening: for it seemed that the lowness of the arch would afford bare passage to our high-built prow. There was no time to unstep the mast, which broke instantly like a reed as we raced on without slackening into blind torrential darkness.

Half-stunned, and striving to extricate myself from the fallen, spar-weighted sail, I felt the chillness of water splashing about me and knew that the boat was filling and sinking. A moment more, and the water was in my ears and eyes and nostrils: but even as I sank and drowned there was still the sense of swift onward motion. Then it seemed dimly that arms were around me in the strangling darkness; and I rose suddenly, choking and gasping and spewing, into sunlight.

WHEN I had rid my lungs of the brine and regained my senses more fully, I found that Mior Lumivix and I were floating in a small haven, shaped like a half-moon, and surrounded by crags and pinnacles of sullen-colored rock. Close by, in a sheer, straight wall, was the inner mouth of the cavern through which the mysterious current had carried us, with faint ripples spreading around it and fading away into water smooth and green as a platter of jade. Opposite, on the haven's farther side, was the long curve of a shelving beach strewn with boulders and driftwood. A boat resembling ours, with an unshipped mast and a furled sail the color of fresh blood, was moored to the beach. Near it, from the shoaling water, protruded the broken-off mast of another boat, whose sunken outlines we discerned obscurely. Two objects which we took for human figures were lying half in and half out of the shallows a little farther along the strand. At that distance we could hardly know whether they were living men or cadavers. Their contours were half-hidden by what seemed a curious sort of brownish-yellow drapery that trailed away amid the rocks, appearing to move and shift and waver incessantly.

"There is mystery here," said Mior Lumivix in a low voice. "We must proceed with care and circumspection."

We swam ashore at the near end of the beach, where it narrowed like the tip of a crescent moon to meet the sea-wall. Taking his arthame from its sheath the Master wiped it dry with the hem of his cloak, bidding me do likewise with my own weapons lest the brine corrode it. Then, hiding the wizard blades beneath our raiment, we followed the broadening beach toward the moored boat and the two reclining figures.

"This is indeed the place of Omvor's chart," observed the Master. "The boat with the blood-red sail belongs to Sarcand. No doubt he has found the cave, which lies hidden somewhere among the rocks. But who are these others? I do not think that they came with Sarcand."

As we neared the figures, the appearance of a yellowish-brown drapery that covered them resolved itself in its true nature. It consisted of a great number of crabs who were crawling over their half-submerged

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bodies and running to and fro behind a heap of immense boulders.

We went forward and stooped over the bodies, from which the crabs were busily detaching morsels of bloody flesh. One of the bodies lay on its face; the other stared with half-eaten features at the sun. Their skin, or what remained of it, was a swarthy yellow. Both were clad in short purple breeks and sailor's boots, being otherwise naked.

"What hellishness is this?" inquired the Master. "These men are but newly dead—and already the crabs rend them. Such creatures are wont to wait for the softening of decomposition. And look—they do not even devour the morsels they have torn, but bear them away."

This indeed was true, for I saw now that a constant procession of crabs departed from the bodies, each carrying a shred of flesh, to vanish beyond the rocks; while another procession came, or perhaps returned, with empty pincers.

"I think," said Mior Lumivix, "that the man with the upturned face is the sailor that I saw leaving Sarcand's room; the thief who had stolen the chart for Sarcand from its owner."

IN MY horror and disgust I had picked up a fragment of rock and was about to crush some of the hideously laden crabs as they crawled away from the corpses.

"Nay," the Master stayed me, "let us follow them."

Rounding the great heap of boulders, we saw that the twofold procession entered, and emerged from, the mouth of a cavern that had heretofore been hidden from view.

With hands tightening on the hilts of our arthames, we went cautiously and circumspectly toward the cavern and paused a little short of its entrance. From this vantage, however, nothing was visible within except the lines of crawling crabs.

"Enter!" cried a sonorous voice that seemed to prolong and repeat the word in far-receding reverberations, like the voice of a ghoul echoing in some profound sepulchral vault.

The voice was that of the sorcerer Sarcand. The Master looked at me, with whole volumes of warning in his narrowed eyes and we entered the cavern.

THE place was high-domed and of indeterminable extent. Light was afforded by a great rift in the vault above, through which, at this hour, the direct rays of the sun slanted in, falling goldenly on the cavern's foreground and tipping with light the great fangs of stalactites and stalagmites in the gloom beyond. At one side was a pool of water, fed by a thin rill from a spring that dripped somewhere in the darkness.

With the shafted splendor shining full upon him, Sarcand reposed half-sitting, half-recumbent, with his back against an open chest of age-darkened bronze. His huge ebon-black body, powerfully muscled though inclining toward corpulence, was nude except for a necklace of rubies, each the size of a plover's egg, that depended about his throat. His crimson sarong, strangely tattered, bared his legs as they lay outstretched amid the cavern's rubble. The right leg had manifestly been broken somewhere below the knee, for it was rudely bound with splints of driftwood and strips torn from the sarong.

Sarcand's cloak of lazuli-colored silk was outspread beside him. It was strewn with graven gems and amulets, with gold coins and jewel-crusted altar-vessels, that flashed and glittered amid volumens of parchment and papyrus. A book with black metal covers lay open as if newly put aside, showing illuminations drawn in fiery ancient inks.

Beside the book, within reach of Sarcand's fingers, was a mound of raw and bloody shreds. Over the cloak, over the coins and scrolls and jewels, crawled the incoming line of crabs, each of which added its torn-off morsel to the mound and then crept on to join the outgoing column.

I could well believe the tales regarding Sarcands' ancestry. Indeed, it seemed that he favored his mother entirely: for his hair and features as well as his skin were those of the Negro cannibals of Naat as I had seen them depicted in travelers' drawings. He fronted us inscrutably, his arms crossed on his bosom. I noticed a great emerald shining darkly on the index finger of his right hand.

"I knew that you would follow me," he said, "even as I knew that the thief and his companion would follow. All of you have thought to slay me and take the treasure. It is true that I have suffered an injury: a fra-

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ment of loosened rock fell from the cavern-roof, breaking my leg as I bent over to inspect the treasures in the opened chest. I must lie here till the bone has knit. In the meanwhile I am well armed . . . and well served and guarded."

"We came to take the treasure," replied Mior Lumivix directly. "I had thought to slay you, but only in fair combat, man to man and wizard to wizard, with none but my neophyte Manthar and the rocks of Iribos for witness."

"Aye, and your neophyte is also armed with an arthame. However, it matters little. I shall feast on your liver, Mior Lumivix, and wax stronger by such power of sorcery as was yours."

This the Master appeared to disregard.

"What foulness have you conjured now?" he inquired sharply, pointing to the crabs who were still depositing their morsels on the grisly mound.

Sarcand held aloft the hand on whose index finger gleamed the immense emerald, set, as we now perceived, in a ring that was wrought with the tentacles of a kraken clasping the orb-like gem.

"I found this ring amid the treasure," he boasted. "It was closed in a cylinder of unknown metal, together with a scroll that informed me of the ring's uses and its mighty magic. It is the signet-ring of Basatan, the sea-god. He who looks long and deeply into the emerald may behold distant scenes and happenings at will. He who wears the ring can exert control over the winds and currents of the sea and over the sea's creatures, by describing certain signs in air with his finger."

WHILE Sarcand spoke it seemed that the green jewel brightened and darkened and deepened strangely, like a tiny window with all the sea's mystery and immensity lying beyond. Enthralled and entranced, I forgot the circumstances of our situation: for the jewel swelled upon my vision, blotting from view the black fingers of Sarcand, with a swirling as of tides and of shadowy fins and tentacles far down in its glimmering greenness.

"Beware, Manthar," the Master murmured in my ear. "We face a dreadful magic, and must retain the command of all our faculties. Avert your eyes from the emerald."

I obeyed the dimly heard whisper. The vision dwindled away, vanishing swiftly, and the form and features of Sarcand returned. His lubber lips were curved in a broad sardonic grin, showing his strong white teeth that were pointed like those of a shark. He dropped the huge hand that wore the signet of Basatan, plunging it into the chest behind him and bringing it forth filled with many-tinted gems, with pearls, opals, sapphires, bloodstones, diamonds, chatoyants. These he let dribble in a flashing rill from his fingers, as he resumed his peroration:

"I preceded you to Iribos by many hours. It was known to me that the outer cavern could be entered safely only at low tide, with an unstepped mast.

"Perhaps you have already inferred whatever else I might tell you. At any rate the knowledge will perish with you very shortly.

"After learning the uses of the ring I was able to watch the seas around Iribos in the jewel. Lying here with my shattered leg, I saw the approach of the thief and his fellow, I called up the sea-current by which their boat was drawn into the flooded cavern, sinking swiftly. They would have swum ashore: but at my command the crabs in the haven drew them under and drowned them; letting the tide beach their corpses later. . . . That cursed thief! I had paid him well for the stolen chart, which he was too ignorant to read, suspecting only that it concerned a treasure-trove. . . .

"Still later I trapped you in the same fashion, after delaying you awhile with contrary winds and an adverse calm, I have preserved you, however, for another doom than drowning."

The voice of the necromancer sank away in profound echoes, leaving a silence fraught with insufferable suspense. It seemed that we stood amid the gaping of undiscovered gulfs, in a place of awful darkness, lit only by the eyes of Sarcand and the ring's talismanic jewel.

The spell that had fallen upon me was broken by the cold ironic tones of the Master:

"Sarcand, there is another sorcery that you have not mentioned."

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Sarcand's laughter was like the sound of a mounting surf. "I follow the custom of my mother's people; and the crabs serve me with that which I require, summoned and constrained by the sea-god's ring."

SO SAYING, he raised his hand and described a peculiar sign with the index finger, on which the ring flashed like a circling orb. The double column of crabs suspended their crawling for a moment. Then, moved as if by a single impulse, they began to scuttle toward us, while others appeared from the cavern's entrance and from its inner recesses to swell their rapidly growing numbers. They surged upon us with a speed beyond belief, assailing our ankles and shins with their knife-sharp pincers as if animated by demons. I stooped over, striking and thrusting with my arthame; but the few that I crushed in this manner were replaced by scores; while others, catching the hem of my cloak, began to climb it from behind and weigh it down. Thus encumbered, I lost my footing on the slippery ground and fell backward amid the scuttling multitude.

Lying there while the crabs poured over me like a seething wave, I saw the Master shed his burdened cloak and cast it aside. Then, while the spell-drawn army still besieged him, climbing upon each other's backs and scaling his very knees and thighs, he hurled his arthame with a strange circular motion at the upraised arm of Sarcand. Straightly the blade flew, revolving like a disk of brightness; and the hand of the black necromancer was sundered cleanly at the wrist, and the ring flashed on its index finger like a falling star as it fell groundward.

Blood spouted in a fountain from the handless wrist, while Sarcand sat as in a stupor, maintaining for a brief instant the gesture of his conjuration. Then his arm dropped to his side and the blood rilled out upon the littered cloak, spreading swiftly amid the gems and coins and volumens, and staining the mound of crab-deposited morsels. As if the arm's movement had been another signal, the crabs fell away from the Master and myself and swarmed in a long, innumerable tide toward Sarcand. They covered his legs, they climbed his great torso, they scrambled for place on his escaladed shoulders. He tore them away with his one hand, roaring terrible curses and imprecations that rolled in countless echoes throughout the cavern. But the crabs still assailed him as if driven by some demoniac frenzy; and blood trickled forth more and more copiously from the small wounds they had made, to suffuse their pincers and streak their shells with broadening rillets of crimson.

It seemed that long hours went by while the Master and I stood watching. At last the prostrate thing that was Sarcand had ceased to heave and toss under the living shroud that enswathed it. Only the splint-bound leg and the lopped-off hand with the ring of Basatan remained untouched by the loathsomely busied crabs.

"Faugh!" the Master exclaimed. "He left his devils behind when he came here; but he found others. . . . It is time that we went out for a walk in the sun. Manthar, my good lubberly apprentice, I would have you build a fire of driftwood on the beach. Pile on the fuel without sparing, to make a bed of coals deep and hot and red as the hearth of hell, in which to roast us a dozen crabs. But be careful to choose the ones that have come freshly from the sea."

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 51)

In its quarter-century of publication WEIRD TALES has had many imitators, but no real competitors. Some of these degenerated—or evolved, if you prefer that term—into straight sicence-fiction magazines, some were so patently sex-motivated that the Post Office and/or the censors took them in hand, some misjudged their market and used *shock—shock—shock!* as their formula and paid small heed to literary composition. All of them are gone, and of a dozen imitative magazines put out ten years ago not one can be found on the newsstands today. WEIRD TALES enters on its second quarter-century as truly the unique magazine as it was when No. 1 of Volume I was offered to a critical public.

SEABURY QUINN.

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The Professor's Teddy Bear

What if we had to live our dreams!

"SLEEP," said the monster. It spoke with its ear, with little lips writhing deep within the folds of flesh, because its mouth was full of blood.

"I don't want to sleep now. I'm having a dream," said Jeremy. "When I sleep, all my dreams go away. Or they're just pretend-dreams. I'm having a real dream now."

"What are you dreaming now?" asked the monster.

"I am dreaming that I'm grown up—"

"Seven feet tall and very fat," said the monster.

"You're silly," said Jeremy. "I will be five feet six and three-eighth inches tall. I will be bald on top and will wear eyeglasses like little thick ashtrays. I will give lectures to young things about human destiny and the metempsychosis of Plato."

"What's a metempsychosis?" asked the monster hungrily.

Jeremy was four and could afford to be patient. "A metempsychosis is a thing that happens when a person moves from one house to another."

"Like when your daddy moved here from Monroe Street?"

"Sort of. But not that kind of a house, with shingles and sewers and things. *This* kind of a house," he said, and smote his little chest.

"Oh," said the monster. It moved up and crouched on Jeremy's throat, looking more like a teddy-bear than ever. "Now?" it begged. It was not very heavy.

"Not now," said Jeremy petulantly. "It'll make me sleep. I want to watch my dream some more. There's a girl who's not listening to my lecture. She's thinking about her hair."

"What about her hair?" asked the monster.

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

BY THEODORE STURGEON

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"It's brown," said Jeremy. "It's shiny, too. She wishes it were golden."

Why?"

"Somebody named Bert likes golden hair."

"Go ahead and make it golden then."

"I can't! What would the other young ones say?"

"Does that matter?"

"Maybe not. Could I make her hair golden?"

"Who is she?" countered the monster.

"She is a girl who will be born here in about twenty years," said Jeremy.

The monster snuggled closer to his neck. "If she is to be born here, then of course you can change her hair. Hurry and do it and go to sleep."

Jeremy laughed delightedly.

"What happened?" asked the monster.

"I changed it," said Jeremy. "The girl behind her squeaked like the mouse with its leg caught. Then she jumped up. It's a big lecture room, you know, built up and away from the speaker-place. It has steep aisles. Her foot slipped on the hard step." He burst into joyous laughter.

"Now what?"

"She broke her neck. She's dead."

The monster sniggered. "That's a very funny dream. Now change the other girl's hair back again. Nobody else saw it, except you?"

"Nobody else saw," said Jeremy. "There! It's changed back again. She never even knew she had golden hair for a little while."

"That's fine. Does that end the dream?"

"I s'pose it does," said Jeremy regretfully. "It ends the lecture, anyhow. The young people are all crowding around the girl with the broken neck. The young men all have sweat under their noses. The girls are all trying to put their fists into their mouths. You can go ahead."

THE monster made a happy sound and pressed its mouth hard against Jeremy's neck. Jeremy closed his eyes.

The door opened. "Jeremy, darling," said Mummy. She had a tired, soft face and smiling eyes. "I heard you laugh."

Jeremy opened his eyes slowly. His lashes were so long that when they swung up, there seemed to be a tiny wind, as if they were dark feather fans. He smiled, and three of his teeth peeped out and smiled too. "I told Fuzzy a story, Mummy," he said sleepily, "and he liked it."

"You darling," she murmured. She came to him and tucked the covers around his chin. He put up his hand and kept the monster tight against his neck.

"Is Fuzzy sleeping?" asked Mummy, her voice crooning with whimsy.

"No," said Jeremy. "He's hungering himself."

"How does he do that?"

"When I eat, the—the hungry goes away. Fuzzy's different."

She looked at him, loving him so much that she did not—could not think. "You're a strange child," she whispered, "and you have the pinkest cheeks in the whole wide world."

"Sure I have," he said.

"What a funny little laugh!" she said, paling.

"That wasn't me. That was Fuzzy. He thinks you're funny."

Mummy stood over the crib, looking down at him. It seemed to be the frown that looked at him, while the eyes looked past. Finally she wet her lips and patted his head. "Good night, baby."

"Good night, Mummy." He closed his eyes. Mummy tiptoed out. The monster kept right on doing it.

IT WAS nap-time the next day, and for the hundredth time Mummy had kissed him and said, "You're so *good* about your nap, Jeremy!" Well, he was. He always went straight up to bed at nap time, as he did at bedtime. Mummy didn't know why, of course. Perhaps Jeremy did not know. Fuzzy knew.

Jeremy opened the toy-chest and took Fuzzy out. "You're hungry, I bet," he said.

"Yes. Let's hurry."

Jeremy climbed into the crib and hugged the teddybear close. "I keep thinking about that girl," he said.

"What girl?"

"The one whose hair I changed."

"Maybe because it's the first time you've changed a person."

"It is not! What about the man who fell into the subway hole?"

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"You moved the hat. The one that blew off. You moved it under his feet so that he stepped on the brim with one foot and caught his toe in the crown, and tumbled in."

"Well, what about the little girl I threw in front of the truck?"

"You didn't touch her," said the monster equably. "She was on roller skates. You broke something in one wheel so it couldn't turn. So she fell right in front of the truck."

Jeremy thought carefully. "Why didn't I ever touch a person before?"

"I don't know," said Fuzzy. "It has something to do with being born in this house, I think."

"I guess maybe," said Jeremy doubtfully.

"I'm hungry," said the monster, settling itself on Jeremy's stomach as he turned on his back.

"Oh, all right," Jeremy said. "The next lecture?"

"Yes," said Fuzzy eagerly. "Dream bright, now. The big things that you say, lecturing. Those are what I want. Never mind the people there. Never mind you, lecturing. The things you say."

THE strange blood flowed as Jeremy relaxed. He looked up to the ceiling, found the hairline crack that he always stared at while he dreamed real, and began to talk.

"There I am. There's the—the room, yes, and the—yes, it's all there, again, There's the girl. The one who has the brown, shiny hair. The seat behind her is empty. This must be after that other girl broke her neck."

"Never mind that," said the monster impatiently. "What do you say?"

"I—" Jeremy was quiet. Finally Fuzzy nudged him. "Oh. It's all about yesterday's unfortunate occurrence, but, like the show of legend, our studies must go on."

"Go on with it then," panted the monster.

"All right, all right," said Jeremy impatiently. "Here it is. We come now to the Gymnosophists, whose ascetic school has had no recorded equal in its extremism. These strange gentry regarded clothing and even food as detrimental to purity of thought. The Greeks also called them *Hylobioi*, a term our more erudite students will notice as analogous to the Sanskrit *Vana-Prasthas*. It is evident that they were a profound influence on Diogenes Laërtius, the Elisian founder of pure skepticism. . . ."

And so he droned on and on. Fuzzy crouched on his body, its soft ears making small masticating motions, sometimes, when stimulated by some particularly choice nugget of esoterica, the ears drooled.

At the end of nearly an hour, Jeremy's soft voice trailed off, and he was quiet. Fuzzy shifted in irritation. "What is it?"

"That girl," said Jeremy. "I keep looking back to that girl while I'm talking."

"Well, stop doing it. I'm not finished."

"There isn't any more, Fuzzy. I keep looking and looking back to that girl until I can't lecture any more. Now I'm saying all that about the pages in the book and the assignment. The lecture is over."

Fuzzy's mouth was almost full of blood. From its ears, it sighed. "That wasn't any too much. But if that's all, then it's all. You can sleep now if you want to."

"I want to watch for a while."

The monster puffed out its cheeks. The pressure inside was not great. "Go on, then." It scrabbled off Jeremy's body and curled up in a sulky huddle.

The strange blood moved steadily through Jeremy's brain. With his eyes wide and fixed, he watched himself as he would be, a slight, balding professor of philosophy.

HE SAT in the hall, watching the students tumbling up the steep aisles, wondering at the strange compulsion he had to look at that girl, Miss—Miss—what was it?

Oh. "Miss Patchell!"

He started, astonished at himself. He had certainly not meant to call out her name. He clasped his hands tightly, regaining the dry stiffness which was his closest approach to dignity.

The girl came slowly down the aisle steps, her wideset eyes wondering. There were books tucked under her arm, and her hair shone. "Yes, Professor?"

"I—" He stopped and cleared his throat. "I know it's the last class today, and you are no doubt meeting someone. I shan't keep you very long . . . and if I do," he

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added, and was again astonished at himself, "you can see Bert tomorrow."

"Bert? Oh!" She colored prettily. "I didn't know you knew about—how *could* you know?"

He shrugged. "Miss Patchell," he said. "You'll forgive an old—ah—middle-aged man's rambling, I hope. There is something about you that—that—"

"Yes?" Caution, and an iota of fright were in her eyes. She glanced up and back at the now empty hall.

ABRUPTLY he pounded the table. "I will *not* let this go on for another instant without finding out about it. Miss Patchell, you are becoming afraid of me, and you are wrong."

"I th-think I'd better . . ." she said timidly, and began backing off.

"Sit down!" he thundered. It was the very first time in his entire life that he had thundered at anyone, and her shock was not one whit greater than his. She shrank back and into a front-row seat, looking a good deal smaller than she actually was, except about the eyes, which were much larger.

The professor shook his head in vexation. He rose, stepped down off the dais, and crossed to her, sitting in the next seat.

"Now be quiet and listen to me." The shadow of a smile twitched his lips and he said, "I really don't know what I am going to say. Listen, and be patient. It couldn't be more important."

He sat a while, thinking, chasing vague pictures around in his mind. He heard, or was conscious of, the rapid but slowing beat of her frightened heart.

"Miss Patchell," he said, turning to her, his voice gentle, "I have not at any time looked into your records. Until—ah—yesterday, you were simply another face in the class, another source of quiz papers to be graded. I have not consulted the registrar's files for information about you. And, to my almost certain knowledge, this is the first time I have spoken with you."

"That's right, sir," she said quietly.

"Very good, then." He wet his lips. "You are twenty-three years old. The house in which you were born was a two-story affair, quite old, with a leaded bay window at the turn of the stairs. The small bedroom, or nursery, was directly over the kitchen. You could hear the clatter of dishes below you when the house was quiet. The address was 191 Bucyrus Road."

"How—oh yes! How did you know?"

He shook his head, and then put it between his hands. "I don't know. I don't know. I lived in that house, too, as a child. I don't know how I knew that you did. There are things in here—" He rapped his head, shook it again. "I thought perhaps you could help."

SHE looked at him. He was a small man, brilliant, tired, getting old swiftly. She put a hand on his arm. "I wish I could," she said warmly. "I do wish I could."

"Thank you, child."

"Maybe if you told me more—"

"Perhaps. Some of it is—ugly. All of it is cloudy, long ago, barely remembered. And yet—"

"Please go on."

"I remember," he half whispered, "things that happened long ago that way, and recent things I remember—twice. One memory is sharp and clear, and one is old and misty. And I remember, in the same misty way, what is happening now and—and what *will* happen!"

"I don't understand."

"That girl. That Miss Symes. She—died here yesterday."

"She was sitting right behind me," said Miss Patchell.

"I know it! I knew what was going to happen to her. I knew it mistily, like an old memory. That's what I mean. I don't know what I could have done to stop it. I don't think I could have done anything. And yet, down deep I have the feeling that it's my fault—that she slipped and fell because of something I did."

"Oh, no!"

He touched her arm in mute gratitude for the sympathy in her tone, and grimaced miserably. "It's happened before," he said. "Time and time and time again. As a boy, as a youth, I was plagued with accidents. I led a quiet life. I was not very strong and books were always more my line than baseball. And yet I witnessed a dozen or more violent, useless deaths—automobile acci-

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dents, drownings, falls, and one or two—" his voice shook—"which I won't mention. And there were countless minor ones—broken bones, maimings, stabbings . . . and every time, in some way, it was my fault, like the one yesterday . . . and I—I—"

"Don't," she whispered. "Please don't. You were nowhere near Elaine Symes when she fell."

"I was nowhere near any of them! That never mattered. It never took away the burden of guilt. Miss Patchell—"

"Catherine."

"Catherine. Thank you so much! There are people called, by insurance actuaries, 'accident prone.' Most of these are involved in accidents through their own negligence, or through some psychological quirk which causes them to defy the world, or to demand attention, by getting hurt. But some are simply present at accidents, without being involved at all—catalysts of death, if you'll pardon a flamboyant phrase. I am, apparently, one of these."

"Then—how could you feel guilty?"

"It was—" He broke off suddenly, and looked at her. She had a gentle face, and her eyes were filled with compassion. He shrugged. "I've said so much," he said. "More would sound no more fantastic, and do me no more damage."

"There'll be no damage from anything you tell me," she said, with a sparkle of decisiveness.

He smiled his thanks this time, sobered, and said, "These horrors—the maimings, the deaths—they were *funny*, once, long ago. I must have been a child, a baby. Something taught me, then, that the agony and death of others was to be promoted and enjoyed. I remember, I—almost remember when that stopped. There was a—a toy, a—a—"

JEREMY blinked. He had been staring at the fine crack in the ceiling for so long that his eyes hurt.

"What are you doing?" asked the monster.

"Dreaming real," said Jeremy. "I am grown up and sitting in the big empty lecture place, talking to the girl with the brown hair that shines. Her name's Catherine."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, all the funny dreams. Only—"

"Well?"

"They're not so funny."

The monster scurried over to him and pounced on his chest. "Time to sleep now. And I want to—"

"No," said Jeremy. He put his hands over his throat. "I have enough now. Wait until I see some more of this real-dream."

"What do you want to see?"

"Oh, I don't know. There's something . . ."

"Let's have some fun," said the monster. "This is the girl you can change, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead. Give her an elephant's trunk. Make her grow a beard. Stop her nostrils up. Go on. You can do anything." Jeremy grinned briefly, and then said, "I don't want to."

"Oh, go on. Just see how funny. . . ."

"A TOY," said the professor. "But more than a toy. It could talk, I think. If I could only remember more clearly!"

"Don't try so hard. Maybe it will come," she said. She took his hand impulsively. "Go ahead."

"It was—something—" the professor said haltingly, "—something soft and not too large. I don't recall . . ."

"Was it smooth?"

"No. Hairy—fuzzy. *Fuzzy!* I'm beginning to get it. Wait, now. . . . A thing like a teddy-bear. It talked. It—why, of course! It was alive!"

"A pet, then. Not a toy."

"Oh, no," said the professor, and shuddered. "It was a toy, all right. My mother thought it was, anyway. It made me—dream real."

"You mean, like Peter Ibbetson?"

"No, no. Not like that." He leaned back, rolled his eyes up. "I used to see myself as I would be later, when I was grown. And before. Oh. Oh—I think it was then—Yes! It must have been then that I began to see all those terrible accidents. It was! It was!"

"Steady," said Catherine. "Tell me quietly."

He relaxed. "Fuzzy. The demon—the

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monster. I know what it did, the devil. Somehow it made me see myself as I grew. It made me repeat what I had learned. It—it ate knowledge! It did; it ate knowledge. It had some strange affinity for me, for something about me. It could absorb knowledge that I gave out. And it—it changed the knowledge into blood, the way a plant changes sunlight and water into cellulose!"

"I don't understand," she said again.

"You don't? How could you? How can I? I know that that's what it did, though. It made me—why, I was spouting my lectures here to the beast when I was four years old! The words of them, the sense of them, came from me *now* to me *then*. And I gave it to the monster, and it ate the knowledge and spiced it with the things it made me do in my real-dreams. It made me trip a man up on a hat, of all absurd things, and fall into a subway excavation. And when I was in my teens, I was right by the excavation to see it happen. And that's the way with all of them! All the horrible accidents I have witnessed, I have half-remembered before they happened. There's no stopping any of them. What am I going to do?"

There were tears in her eyes. "What about me?" she whispered—more, probably, to get his mind away from his despair than for any other reason.

"You. There's something about you, if only I could remember. Something about what happened to that—that toy, that beast. You were in the same environment as I, as that devil. Somehow, you are vulnerable to it and—Catherine, Catherine, I think that something was done to you that—"

He broke off. His eyes widened in horror. The girl sat beside him, helping him, pitying him, and her expression did not change. But—everything else about her did.

Her face shrank, shivelled. Her eyes lengthened. Her ears grew long, grew until they were like donkey's ears, like rabbit's ears, like horrible, long hairy spider's legs. Her teeth lengthened into tusks. Her arms shrivelled into jointed straws, and her body thickened.

It smelled like rotten meat.

There were filthy claws scattering out of her polished open-toed shoes. There were bright sores. There were—other things. And all the while she—*it*—held his hand and looked at him with pity and friendliness.

The professor—

JEREMY sat up and flung the monster away. "It isn't funny!" he screamed. "It isn't funny, it isn't, it isn't, it *isn't!*"

The monster sat up and looked at him with its soft, bland, teddy-bear expression. "Be quiet," it said. "Let's make her all squashy now, like soft-soap. And hornets in her stomach. And we can put her—"

Jeremy clapped his hands over his ears and screwed his eyes shut. The monster talked on. Jeremy burst into tears, leapt from the crib and, hurling the monster to the floor, kicked it. It grunted. "That's funny!" screamed the child. "Ha ha!" he cried, as he planted both feet in its yielding stomach. He picked up the twitching mass and hurled it across the room. It struck the nursery clock. Clock and monster struck the floor together in a flurry of glass, metal, and blood. Jeremy stamped it all into a jagged, pulpy mass, blood from his feet mixing with blood from the monster, the same strange blood which the monster had pumped into his neck. . . .

Mummy all but fainted when she ran in and saw him. She screamed, but he laughed, screaming. The doctor gave him sedatives until he slept, and cured his feet. He was never very strong after that. They saved him, to live his life and to see his real-dreams; funny dreams, and to die finally in a lecture room, with his eyes distended in horror while horror froze his heart, and a terrified young woman ran crying, crying for help.

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The Merrow

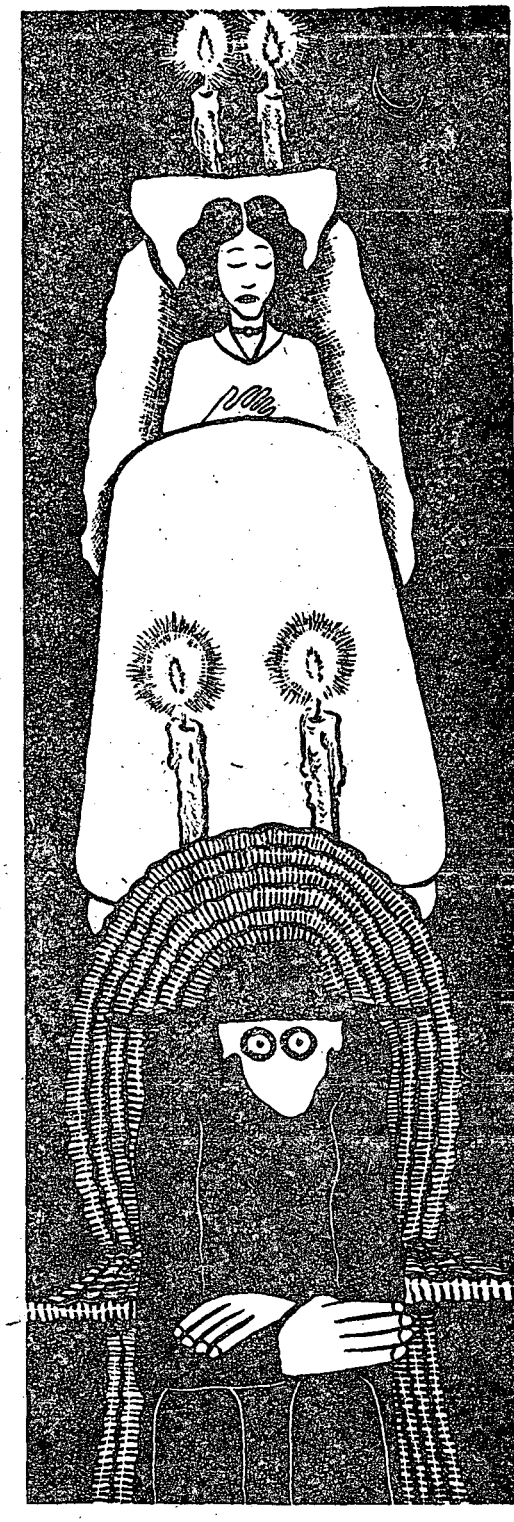
BY SEABURY QUINN

HE SAT in the big chair of plaited straw as still as a man in a painted portrait, and the deepening dusk grew heavier about him. Faint luminance from clouds lit by the moon behind them gave an air of unreality to the whole scene, something like twilight, something like the light before the dawn, yet neither, and across the turf-ringed flagstones of the terrace little rays of amber brightness crept like timid children venturing into the dark, then drawing back, affrighted at their own boldness. That would be from the candles. The tall white candles at her head and feet. Earlier there had been prayers and Scripture reading—*"In the sight of the unwise they seem to die, but they are in peace"*—but now there was just talk, the hushed, half-whispered talk reserved for such occasions.

"Wirra," came the lament of a tenant farmer as he drew his cap on at the door, "to think herself is dead, an' her so beautiful an' all," and his wife's sharp whispered rebuke as she slipped the shawl from her head to her shoulders: "Musha, man, do not be talkin'. 'Tis th' lovely angel she'll be makin', so she will!"

The day before they'd found her at the shore with all the fine high color gone from her face, and the quiet waves caressing her as tenderly as if they sought to rock her into deeper sleep. The seaside path was treacherous after dark, and more than one unwary walker had slipped to his death in the cove, but it was death by misadventure, and so a crowner's case, and not until the solemn men of law and the *Garde Siochana*—civil guard—had done with her did they release her to be buried in the churchyard.

His feelings puzzled him. He wondered why he did not cry, at least why he did not



Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

"In the sight of the unwise they seem to die but they are in peace."

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feel crushed with grief. He didn't. The loss of a pet animal when he had been a lad had caused him sharper sorrow than the tragic taking of this woman who had been his wife less than a year.

A sudden pang of conscience stabbed him. Peer Gynt had fathered an imp with the Troll King's daughter by mere thought; could a vagrant, unexpressed wish—the passionate upflaring of desire—have brought Rosalys to the water—"Nonsense!" he spurned the thought from his mind. "Rubbish!" Such fancies were for the Irish, the mystically superstitious Irish who were either mad or childish, often both, but he was an American, and sane.

The susurrus of talk had come at last to a close, and the lamps that burned in dining room and hall had been extinguished. Now only the faint yellow light of candles remained in the house, and outside the moonglow and starshine. The lattice of a casement rattled softly and the vicar's step lisped on the flagstones. "Poor Stephen," the old man's hand pressed his shoulder affectionately. "I know, Stephen, lad. Words aren't much use at times like this, are they? I understand."

But he didn't. Nobody understood, least of all Stephen McKelvy, whose bride "lay by the wall" with corpse lights at her head and feet, and for whom life held no more meaning than a pied picture puzzle with half its pieces missing.

THERE had, for instance, been no valid reason for his coming to Eire in the first place. Nothing but a whim, a sort of childish curiosity, had drawn him over St. George's Channel to Dublin, and thence across the island to this little coastal village twenty miles north of the Shannon. True it was his ancestors had come from there, but Ireland itself meant scarcely more to him than a name on a map.

His grandfather's father had come from Kildillon during the great famine of '46, and like so many of his countrymen had prospered in the new world. A job as driver of a Broadway stage was followed by appointment to the police force, and when he'd done his honorable service in the Civil War he profited by the political good fortune of the returned soldier. Boss Tweed's star had begun to rise and with it rose the star of Kevin McKelvy. From ward captain to alderman he moved, then to appointment as a police magistrate. At fifty-five he was the owner of two prosperous saloons and a fine livery stable, at sixty-five he yielded up the ghost and was laid in St. Patrick's churchyard, leaving a substantial fortune and a son who was already married and a father.

The son advanced the family fortunes, and when the motor car began to crowd the horse from the highways he was ready for the change. He left his son a fully equipped garage and the agency for one of the most popular makes of cars.

Then Stephen came, and into his lap dropped the whole accumulation of his forbear's labors. His great-grandfather had been forthright peasant stock and not ashamed of it, proud of his achievement in his new home, proud but holding an affectionate memory for the land of his origin. Ireland had been only a legend to his grandfather, and to his father even less than that. Somewhere along the line they had departed from the ancient faith, the Irish blood had been diluted by mixed marriages, and Stephen had no ties of faith, blood or affection for the Old Sod. When war came he was put in Motor Transport and served in a car pool in England till V-J Day.

Then on sudden impulse he decided to go over to the land of his ancestors. The automotive business was all shot to hell at home, and he was at a loose end, more than comfortably supplied with funds, and in no hurry to get back to New York.

Was it a whim that brought him back, he sometimes wondered, or had it been the homing instinct, the instinct that brings back the wild geese to West Meath and Roscommon from halfway round the world?

He had pictured Ireland as a land of thriftless waste, a land oppressed by poverty in which only the lazy and unfortunate remained and from which those with ambition fled to other lands to remember it only with a sort of contemptuous affection.

After the austerities of wartime England he found it a land like that which Moses' spies viewed from the mountain top. A land which literally flowed milk and honey, for in the lush green pastures cattle stood shin-deep in grass and clover, and the

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brown bees came home laden to capacity with nectar from the clover and the orchards.

At the Moruadh Inn at Kildillon were eggs and Irish bacon and thick steaks and mutton cutlets such as he had not seen since he left America, and cream—not powdered milk—to stir into his coffee, and golden butter for his fine white bread. The farms about the village were well kept as those of Dutchess County, and the white-walled, brown-thatched farmhouses substantial as any he had ever seen. Everywhere was peace, content and prosperity, and no one said "be gorra" or "be gob" or acted in the least like a stage Irishman.

On Sunday he attended morning prayer at the ugly little Anglican Church of St. Brandon, a square-built stone structure dating from the sixteenth century with pews of age-black oak and tombstones of long dead and gone parishioners in the aisles, and after service the vicar spoke to him with grave old-world courtesy and invited him to tea that evening.

Tea at a country vicarage—something right out of Jane Austin! This would be something to tell them about when he got back. Most likely it would be ghastly, with the old man maundering of politics, perhaps recalling the good days before disestablishment and hinting a donation would not be taken amiss.

THE vicarage was mellow as a piece of Ming porcelain or a carpet out of Hamadan in the blue twilight. Red-brick, ivy-covered, with tall trees about it and a lawn as smooth and fine-grained as green velvet it stood just beyond the little churchyard with its yew and hemlocks, and from its long windows amber light glowed welcome. Inside was a mellow atmosphere of heirlooms, ancestors and history. Candles in tall silver standards shed a warmth of apricot-hued light on mahogany polished to a satin finish, Georgian silver, rugs from Shiraz and the blurred blues and reds and purples of old china. Portraits in gilt frames blinked benignly from the walls, peat smoldered aromatically in the brass fire-grate, and over all there was an air of contentment and well being.

So much he saw at a glance, contrasting the perfect setting with the shocking lack of taste he had encountered in most English homes, then he lost interest in the room, for Mr. de Barry introduced: "My daughter Rosalys, Mr. McKelvy."

He saw first the great mass of her hair, tawny as the leafage of a copper beech, which seemed more like a splash of vivid color in a Titian portrait than a woman's tresses, then the small nose with its slim patrician nostrils, the clear and steady zircon-green eyes, and the mouth and chin that bespoken both sensitiveness and courage. He thought her dinner dress was simple green, but he could not be sure, for he was bemused by the beauty of her calm, fine face, the wealth of tawny hair, the lyric grace of her long, lovely hands. She was not large or tall but she seemed so because of her superb carriage, and from the dim, wiped-over past memories of stories he had heard from his grandfather, stories of the ancient heroines of Ireland, of Queen Maeve of Connaught who had led a hundred thousand raiders over the uplands, and Eimer who had died for love of Cochulainn dead on the field of battle, of Eibhlin the high king's daughter who had fled her father's castle to share exile with flame-haired Cuin O'Caian the charioteer.

There were oat *ferrels* and sandwiches of ham and cucumber and a fine white cake with pink icing to eat with the bland aromatic China tea, and a bottle of Jameson's Green Label, softer and less smoky than the Scottish brew but powerful as black magic, and fine cream sherry out of Malaga, but more intoxicating than the wine or whiskey was the talk—tales of ancient days when Gilles de Barrie came with Strongbow and his Normans in 1170, and of Shoneen of the same name who was with Napper Tandy on his ill-starred expedition and was sent back by the Germans out of Hamburg—may they find no quiet in the grave!—to be hanged by the English in Dublin town.

"But I thought that you were Protestants," McKelvy argued. "Surely—"

"Och, surely, now, you've heard tales from the Irishmen who make a business out of being Irish in America!" the vicar chuckled. "Not one of 'em would risk his precious hide to fight the *Sassenach*, and I'll wager none of 'em would tell you Nap-

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per Tandy was a Protestant, and Emmet—rest his soul!—a Freemason to boot."

The moon was round and bright as a new-minted coin when Stephen said good night and Mr. de Barry offered to "leave him a bit o' the road."

"You're stopping at the inn, belike?" he asked as they climbed the stile that spanned the hedge between the vicarage garden and the church-yard.

"Yes. They call it the Moruadh. That means the Mermaid, I assume. There's a picture on the sign that might have been a mermaid once, though it's so faded now—"

"Not quite a mermaid," the vicar paused to stuff an improbably black briar with impossibly black tobacco and struck a match against the ferrule of his blackthorn. "The mermaid is a harmless kind of creature, and gentle as a dolphin, but the moruadh, now, is something else again. The merrow, as it's called in English, is sinister. It calls up storms to plague the fishing fleets, it draws the fishers down to the green depths. Sometimes it comes out on the shore, and woe betide the mortal who sees it. It's beautiful with an inhuman beauty, but deadly in its comeliness, for it can draw a man's soul through his lips with its kissing—there's a legend that a merrow haunts the cove down by the sea-walk between here and the village. That's where the inn gets its name—"

"Surely, sir," McKelvy laughed, "you don't believe such nonsense." All at once he felt as if he were a grown-up humoring a child in some fantastic make-believe.

"I wouldn't say that I believe it, no," the vicar seemed more serious than the occasion warranted. "But we don't dismiss all stories of that ilk as old wives' tales. It's hard to say just what one believes. In Ireland, you know, the other world's almost as close to us as the next turning in the lane, and—the path *is* treacherous above the cove, that may account for it—more than one lad has passed that way at night and been picked up in the sea next morning, dry-drowned."

"Dry-drowned?" McKelvy echoed questioningly.

"Aye. With lungs collapsed as if an air-pump had drawn all the breath from them, and not a spot of sea-water inside him."

Once more McKelvy laughed, but this time there was something thin and tinny in the sound. A cloud had swept across the bleached disc of the moon, a yellow cloud with tattered, frayed-out edges, and a strange eerie dusk crept across the landscape. The soft wind soughing through the gnarled boughs of the ancient apple trees seemed to have withdrawn itself and in its stead there was a cold hard dampness that seemed formlessly menacing.

MORNING came, a cool and lovely day with limpid wine-sweet air and sunlight glinting on wet trees and grass. He breakfasted luxuriously in the ordinary of the inn; a porringer of oatmeal with sugar in abundance and a jug of clotted cream, eggs fried golden-brown in rich, sweet butter, grilled kidneys and thick-sliced Irish bacon and a pewter mug of shandy-gaff—mixed ginger-beer and stout—that made him feel a little—just a very little—fuddled, but supremely contented with life.

Afterwards he set off down the ironed highroad, but soon turned off to the rolling path that skirted the cliffs by the sea. To left of him the ocean stretched clear to America, a vast and shimmering surface where the sun struck, and here and there a white and curling wave; green, shaggy meadows lay to his right, and in the distance peaty smoke rose from the cottages. The gray gulls wheeled above him, shirking with the sea's immense melancholy, and presently she came toward him along the undulating footway.

She wore rough heather-tinted tweeds, a skirt and jacket that looked oddly mannish on a figure so divinely feminine, and a small brown felt hat pulled over her bright hair.

Two half-grown Aberdeen terriers were with her, and seemed riotously glad to see him, almost tearing the leash from her hand in the exuberance of their welcome. "Hullo," she greeted, frankly pleased, and just as frankly surprised, at the meeting. "How are you?"

"Great," he answered with enthusiasm, pulling at the puppies' pointed ears. "Going my way?"

She seemed pondering the question. "Which way is that?".

"Whichever way you're going," he returned, and they both laughed, and won-

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dered why they'd never laughed so joyously before.

Summer deepened and the pear and apple trees were gravid with their fruitage. The mornings had a golden smile, the noontides a sweet somnolence, the nights were moon-washed fantasies, starred overhead with a bright glittering web of asterisms and with the dim white constellations of the bo-flowers below.

Rosalys and Stephen had been on a picnic, seeking out a little spot they knew on the *slieve*—the round-topped heather-covered mountain—and now they lay upon the soft sweet grass and let the sun press on their closed eyelids. The luncheon basket had been emptied of its sandwiches, and beneath its folded napkin thrust the slender necks of emptied Rhine wine bottles. Youth and a clear conscience and the steep climb up the hill had given them keen appetites, and there was little left for bird and insect when they'd finished. The warm scent of the clover was about them, and the delicate odor of fern.

She locked her hands behind her neck and smiled up at the rowan tree that stretched its branches like a canopy above them, and a little sigh pushed past her lips.

"What gives?" asked Stephen, and she chuckled with delight at the Americanism.

"There's always something sad about all happiness, *acushla*. Perhaps because we know it cannot last and so sigh for it, even while we have it."

"You've liked today?"

She shivered as with a sudden chill, then laughed. "I wish that it could be like this forever; that we could have today frozen into a little eternity."

He looked at her dazedly, like a man who sees a miracle. His pulses raced till he could hardly speak, but somehow he contrived it. "Why not make it last forever?" he asked huskily. "Rosalys, I—will you marry me?"

He had risen in his agitation, now she rose and faced him, her eyes fixed on him steadily. "You love me—truly love me—Stephen McKelvy?"

"With all my heart and soul—"

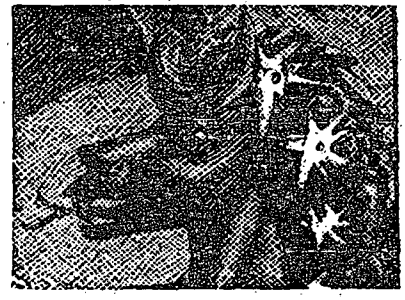
Her arms were suddenly about his neck, warm and tender, and her voice was full of gentleness and laughter. "*Avick*," she whispered. "*Acushla, cuisle mo chroidhe!*" She spoke the soft Erse endearments as naturally as a mother speaks love-talk to her child. "My boy, my darling, blood of my heart!" and her face was like an angel's, so much of happiness and beauty there was in it. Then she turned her sweet cool lips up for his kiss.

"AYE, Stephen lad," the vicar asked when they told him, "you'll be taking her back to the States with you?"

"Why, yes, sir, that's my home—"

"Small blame to you, *avick*. Since history began, and before, Irish-women have gone with their men to exile or to high adventure, but there's one favor I'd be asking. Stay here, if business will permit, until I see my first grandchild. I'm just from Limerick and Dr. O'Boyle, and—" he smiled as though no shadow threatened him—"he tells me to be watching for the *cóiste-bodhar* any night now."

"The *cóiste-bodhar?*"



"Aye, lad. The Anglo-Irish call it coach-a-bower—the great black coach drawn by six headless black horses and driven by a headless postilion that comes to collect the souls of the dead. It's the heart, Stephen. It may keep ticking for a year or two; it may stop beating the next minute, and I wouldn't have the strength to come out to you."

"Why, of course," Stephen agreed. There was no urgent reason for his going back. The business was in competent hands, and it would be a year or two, or perhaps three, before the motor companies got into production again. "We'll take the Dower House and stay right here—" He nodded reassuringly to the old man, but more than ever he felt like a sane man set down in a world inhabited by amiable lunatics. The coach-a-

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bower . . . headless horses, headless driver! Good Lord, next they'd be telling him the banshee had been heard outside the vicarage windows!

Liffery manor house had been burned in the fall of '21, but the little red-brick dower house was still intact, and there they set up housekeeping. The autumn had advanced and the wind made busy little whirls among the dust along the roads, and then forgot itself to go chasing after leaves. The chestnut trees shook down their fruits, and on the rowans small red berries bitter as the pangs of death shone jewel-bright. At night the candles burned with steady amber light or oil lamps filled the rooms with creamy brightness. By day they took long walks or went down to the town on shopping expeditions or to the "kinema." A few times they went to the races and lost more than they won, but since their bets were very modest they made small account of their losses. Life was sweet and pleasant as existence in *tir-na-hóige,* the Islands of the Blest, "where you can buy happiness for a penny," but gradually Stephen tired of it.

His short life had been filled with action —school, business, the army—and the easy tempo of the lazy days wore on his nerves as music heard too often may be first monotonous, then irritating, finally unbearable. He took to walking out alone at night, and when Rosalys called after him, "Be careful where you go, *acushla,* the moruadh may be waiting at the cove!" he muttered something very like a curse upon all crazy, superstitious Irish.

SPRING came gently, washing up the steep slopes of the hills in a green tide and breaking at their summits in a froth of blossoms. Pear and apple trees and plums swung their little white branches in the breeze, and through the land there sang so sweet a wind that you could almost see its perfume taking form. But the season brought no surcease of his mood to Stephen. More and more he longed for New York, for Fifth Avenue awash with life and color, for Central Park with its fresh greens as yet unblurred with dust, and the clatter of roller skates on the walks of the side streets.

He had left early for his walk that evening, for Rosalys no longer ventured out on tramps. Twice every week she went to the doctor's and presently, before the end of June . . . The evening had come softly, with the blue dusk settling gently as a curtain, now the night was full to overflowing with big twinkling stars and the moon was round and white in the sky as a Chinese lamp. He heard the little chanty of the waves against the rocks below the path as he swung past the cove, and grinned wryly at the superstition which had doubtless made the simple sound the echo of some ghostly chorus. Then he halted as abruptly as if he heard a sharp command.

She was coming toward him slowly, and at first he could not say if he saw her or if it were a trick of moonlight shining on the pebbles of the path.

She was tall, as tall as a tall man, and grandly made, like some heroic statue. There was about her nothing of color except her eyes, and they were indeterminate in hue, now gray, now blue, like sea-water. From neck to insteps she was encased in a long, flowing gown which might have been fine wool or linen, for it shone with a faint iridescence where the moonlight struck it, and across the forepart of her head she wore an ancient celtic *lann,* a crescent-shaped blade of silver which almost matched the hair beneath it, for the hair was such pale gold it might have passed for platinum or silver, and, laced with strands of pearls, it hung in two great braids as thick as a man's arm almost to the hem of her white robe. There were bracelets on her arms and round her throat a strand of pearls as white as ocean foam, but no whiter than the throat on which they rested. Her face he could not see, for just below her eyes was hung a veil of lace as fine as sea-spume, yet opaque as a casque of metal, but he knew instinctively that it was beautiful with a fairness like that of Trojan Helen which having gazed on once a man was past all saving, and beyond desire of being saved. She moved with a consummate grace, like a skater gliding over smooth ice, or a spirit floating, and he could have sworn the rounded pebbles of the sea-path were not moved beneath the pressure of her long and narrow feet.

It would not be quite true to say that he was frightened, but something very like fright filled his mind, and something like

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a chill was in his brain as she approached him.

And then he was upon his knees while his blood pulsed in a quick, hurrying rhythm, and he felt his scalp grow tight and the hair on his head begin to prickle, for this was something awe-inspiring he saw, some creature from another world, a being out of some antique pantheon without a sense of kindness or compassion, demanding worship as her due, and making no requital for that worship.

"Welcome, Kelvy son of Kelvy," she said softly as she came to pause before him, and her voice was like the echoing of bells across a great distance. "Welcome back to the home of your fathers." He knew she did not speak in English nor in Erse, her words were in a tongue long since forgotten when the first foundation-stone of Khufu's pyramid was laid, yet he understood her perfectly.

"What—who are you, lady?" he asked breathlessly, knowing by instinct rather than reason she could understand him.

Her laugh was like the murmur of small waves upon a sandy beach, like water slipping gently over moss-clothed rocks. "I am what was and is and will be, Kelvy mic Kelvy. Since first the waters separated from the land I have been loved of men, and for those who win my favor I draw back my veil. Would you look on my face, Kelvy mic Kelvy?"

He could find no words for answer. He knew as he knew that he breathed that more than anything in life he wanted to look on the coldly classic face behind the shimmering veil, and yet some inward sentinel of the spirit warned him against the desire. To see her face would mean the end of something—something infinitely precious; life, perhaps.

Once more she laughed, not quite maliciously, but certainly not kindly. The sort of laugh a mistress might give at the puzzlement of a pet animal; indulgent, faintly amused, slightly contemptuous. She held her hand out to him and he raised it to his lips as if it were some holy reliquary. Her flesh was cold as the spray dashing on the rocks below, but firm and lovely to the touch, and he could feel the faintest taste of salt upon his lips when he had kissed all five of her fingers, and her knuckles, and the cool, lined palm of her hand.

HE reeled and staggered like a drunken man all the way home, and when Rosalys met him with hands outstretched and eager lips uplifted he put her aside almost roughly, for suddenly his life seemed empty as a house in which no one had lived for a long time, and her mortal beauty was no match for that immortal fairness he had looked on, nor her warm gracious hands the equals of that cold and perfect hand which he had worshipped with his lips.

The next night he went out at dusk, and the next, and on the third she asked half playfully, half timidly, "Where is it that you're going every night, *avoureen?* The sea-walk is an evil place to wander in the moonlight, for the moruadh may be abroad, and I'll not be having her take my man from me—"

He turned on her, his brows drawn down, his lips pressed hard against his teeth, cold anger in his eyes. "I'm going out because it pleases me to do it, and where I go and what I do there is nobody's business."

She took a short step back and looked at him with wide, puzzled eyes. He had hurt her, hurt her terribly, but she held no resentment. She was only amazed at his unkindness.

His conscience cut him as he stamped along the sea-path. Rosalys was so gentle, so loving and confiding, but—he stamped the mounting flame of tenderness out ruthlessly—the radiant being from the sea, the goddess . . .

In a little while he reached the cove and presently she came, tall, lissome, lovely to regard, her sea-hued eyes alight with amusement as he knelt and put her hand to his lips.

The breath came fast in his throat and his heart seemed bursting as he looked up at her in adoration. "Lady," he murmured, "Lovely lady from the sea, show me your face. In pity's name I ask it. Put back your veil." Her laugh was like the sweep of gentle winds across the waters. "My face may be the last thing that you see, Kelvy mic Kelvy. Would you consent to that? What would you give to look upon it?"

"Anything—anything! My life, my soul,

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all that I have and hope to have—" The very beating of his heart stopped the words in his throat, but his tortured eyes said what his lips could not.

There was satisfaction, gloating, in the low laugh of her answer. "Be it so, then Kelvy son of Kelvy. Come to me on the first night of the waning moon and you shall have your desire." Then she held her hands out to him and suffered him to kiss them.

His mind was scrambled as a dust-bin as he reeled home on the narrow path. She had promised, given him her word that he might look upon her face. No Mussulman intent upon the Prophet's Paradise, no sinner dying in the hope of pardon, could have looked forward more eagerly than he did to the fulfillment of her promise.

Once more the hand of conscience plucked at his thought. Rosalys . . . his sweet, kind Rosalys, whom he had hurt so bitterly that night, who was about to go down into the Valley of the Shadow . . . He put the thought from him as one might thrust a beggar aside. If only he were free, free from all entanglements . . . if Rosalys should not survive . . . his conscious mind revolted from the cynical-conclusion, but underneath his consciousness the thought kept festering . . . If she should not survive . . .

HE did not know that Rosalys had followed him when he flung out of the house, nor that she watched him as he knelt before the being who had put her spell on him. He did not see her hurry down the sea-path when he left his rendezvous, nor hear her challenge:

"Creature of the sea, give back my man. Heathen goddess, fairy-wife or ghost-thing, you cannot put the terror on me, for though I'm but a mortal woman the soul in me is immortal, and though I have no magic, my love for my man—"

He did not see the long white arms of the sea-woman reach out like the tentacles of a devil-fish, nor see the brief, sharp struggle on the narrow path. He did not see the two forms, locked in combat, hover for a moment on the unfenced rim of the footway, nor see them launch into the air to drop the eighty feet and more of the cliff's height, turning in their course end over end, wheeling like the arms of a great windmill, striking with an almost soundless splash when they at last had reached the quiet water of the cove.

None of this he saw or heard, for he was like a man enmeshed in a charm, but when at last the lights of home shone like a beacon in the dark his love and loyalty had conquered. Rosalys and he were one, inextricably bound together by their plighted troth: ". . . these twain shall be one flesh . . . therefore shall a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife . . ."

"Rosalys!" he called as he let himself in. "I'm sorry, dear, so sorry and ashamed that I—*Rosalys!*" His voice reverberated like a shout in a tunnel. The little old house was as quiet as the craters of a dead world, as a church from which the worshippers had gone. The rooms once bright with candlelight and firelight, once full of the sweet scent of glowing peat and golden with the music of her singing voice were quiet with the quiet of a world that once had lived but now was dead. "Rosalys!" His voice had the hard raucousness of ripping fabric . . .

All night he walked a frustrated rectangle in the small sitting room, pausing at each little sound, looking eagerly down the bricked path of the garden, seeing her returning form in every shadow of the beech trees swaying with the night wind. He put the kettle on the hob, got out the tea caddy and the sugar bowl and cream jug—she might be chilled when she came home, a dish of tea would warm her. . . . And in the morning they came with the news that they had found her at the shore, with the fine high color gone from her face and the quiet waves caressing her as if they sought to rock her into deeper sleep.

Was he to blame? Was he her murderer? Peer Gynt had bred an imp on the daughter of the Troll King by mere lustful thought; could a vagrant, unexpressed wish—the momentary passionate upflaring of desire—have brought Rosalys to the water?

Beneath the risen moon the night was like fairyland. The shrubbery of the garden rustled gently in the small breeze and the moon-stained leaves shook softly; purple shadows and bright dancing highlights rushed together, blending in a maze of shimmering halftones. He rose slowly from

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the big chair, moving stiffly like an infirm old man, and without stopping for his cap or topcoat, without so much as a glance back, went down the garden walk, let himself out at the gate, and shambled toward the sea-path.

She was magnificent in the cold glow of light reflected from the sky and sea. Straight, statuesque, "divinely tall and most divinely fair," she moved toward him with a grace like the passage of a wind across a field of growing grain. He did not kneel to her. Instead he looked directly in her sea-gray eyes and there was hatred in his gaze. This emanation from the cold, pitiless ocean, this being from another, older world . . . had it not been for her Rosalys, his Rosalys, might still be filling all the little Dower House with silver song and golden laughter while she waited for her rendezvous with destiny. . . .

"You have come, Kelvy son of Kelvy?" There was a questioning inflection in her tone, though she made the statement as an assertion. "You have not failed our tryst."

"Aye, I am here," his voice was hard and gritty, with an undertone of desperate bitterness, "I've come to tell you—"

"Look, Kelvy son of Kelvy," there was softness almost like a caress in her words, "this is what you came to see, is it not?" and from before her face she put the veil of shimmering fabric.

He gave a gasp, a small sound like that of a hurt animal, and his eyes widened as he looked and looked again as if he'd never have his fill of looking.

Her face was like a mask, immobile, inscrutable. The features were clear-cut as those of an itaglio, and faultless with the regularity seen in the sculptured faces of those goddesses the Greeks delighted to honor. The high broad brow continued down into the nose without the slightest indication of a curve and the mouth beneath it was thin-lipped and rather large, but curved exquisitely into a perfect Cupid's bow and tinted the rich, glowing rose of coral. The chin was strong and inclined to be pointed, and the gray-blue eyes beneath the finely arching pale-gold brows were plumbless as the ocean's deepest depths. Her skin was an incredibly beautiful shade of ivory, not the dead-white of marble, nor the faint pink of human flesh, but with a lightly glowing iridescence like that of a perfect pearl. Despite its coldly classic beauty there was longing in the face, an avid longing not to be denied, and yet a longing which seemed utterly impersonal, like the longing of the sea that takes and takes, yet never has its fill of sacrifices.

"Is this not what you came to see, Kelvy mic Kelvy?" asked the soft, entrancing voice as she held out white, bare arms to him.

He sobbed. A hard, dry, ugly sob that was the requiem and valedictory of his manhood. He hated and despised himself. He knew that for this sight he had paid out the last scruple of his honor, had given all the love and loyalty and faith he owed his woman, belike had thrown his soul into the balance to bring the scales down to the level of his lust, and so he sobbed with self-accusing bitterness.

Then he was in her arms. They closed about him as the sea might close about a drowning man, and he was helpless in their embrace. Helpless, and glad to be so. There was an odor of the fresh, cool sea about her, clean, invigorating, sharp with the keen smell of salt, and the lips pressed against his were cool as water stirring in the sea-caves in the stony shores of Aran.

She drew him to her still more tightly, and her great eyes closed, then opened part way, and between the lids he saw their shimmer, fiery-blue. There was neither warmth nor pulsing in her bosom, only a great, soothing coolness like the coolness of the summer ocean when the moon is down and the sun not yet risen.

There was a seething chaos in his brain; he was incapable of thought, and a frantic feeling in his breast. His heart fought like a caged bird and his pulses hurried with a rhythm like the rattling of hailstones against a roof. The breath was going out of him. The breath, the life, the soul of him was flowing from his mouth and into hers.

Two bodies locked in an unbreakable embrace slipped from the unfenced lip of the sea-path and dropped in a long arc into the moonlit waters of the cove.

There was a splash, a ripple, and then silence.

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Roman Remains

BY ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

ANTHONY BREDDLE, airman, home on sick leave from India, does not feel himself called upon to give an opinion; he considers himself a recorder only. The phrase *credo quia impossibile*, had never come his way; neither had Blake's dictum that "everything possible to be believed is an image of truth."

He was under thirty, intelligent enough, observant, a first-rate pilot, but with no special gifts or knowledge. A matter of fact kind of fellow, unequipped on the imaginative side, he was on his way to convalesce at his step-brother's remote place in the Welsh mountains. The brother, a much older man, was a retired surgeon, honored for his outstanding work with a knighthood and now absorbed in research.

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

The airman glanced again at the letter of invitation:

". . . a lonely, desolate place, I'm afraid, with few neighbors, but good fishing which, I know, you adore. Wild little valleys run straight up into the mountains almost from

Queer things were said to go on in the little glen called Goat Valley. . . .

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the garden, you'll have to entertain yourself. I've got lots of fishing rods for you. Nora Ashwell, a cousin you've never met, a nurse, also on sick leave of sorts but shortly going back to her job, is dying for companionship of her own age. She likes fishing too. But my house isn't a hospital! And there's Dr. Leidenheim, who was a student with me at Heidelberg ages ago, a delightful old friend. Had a Chair in Berlin, but got out just in time. His field is Roman Culture—lots of remains about here—but that's not your cup of tea, I know. Legends galore all over the place and superstitions you could cut with a knife. Queer things said to go on in a little glen called Goat Valley. But that's not down your street either. Anyhow, come along and make the best of it; at least we have no bombing here. . . ."

So Breddle knew what he was in for more or less, but was so relieved to get out of the London blitz with a chance of recovering his normal strength, that it didn't matter. Above all, he didn't want a flirtation, nor to hear about Roman remains from the Austrian refugee scholar.

It was certainly a desolate spot, but the house and grounds were delightful, and he lost no time in asking about the fishing. There was a trout stream, it seemed, and a bit of the Wye not too far away with some good salmon pools. At the moment, as rain had swollen the Wye, the trout stream was the thing to go for; and before an early bed that night he had made the acquaintance of the two others, Nora and Emil Leidenheim. He sized them up, as he called it: the latter a charming, old-fashioned man with considerable personality, cautious of speech, and no doubt very learned; but Nora, his cousin, by no means to his taste. Easy to look at certainly, with a kind of hard, wild beauty, pleasant enough too, if rather silent, yet with something about her he could not quite place beyond that it was distasteful. She struck him as unkempt, untidy, self-centered, careless as to what impression she made on her company, her mind and thoughts elsewhere all the time. She had been out walking that afternoon, yet came to their war-time supper still in shorts. A negligible matter, doubtless, though the three men had all done something by way of tidying up a bit. Her eyes and manner conveyed something he found baffling; as though she was always on the watch, listening, peering for something that was not there. Impersonal, too, as the devil. It seemed a foolish thing to say, but there was a hint in her atmosphere that made him uncomfortable, uneasy, almost gave him a touch of the creeps. The two older men, he fancied, left her rather alone.

Outwardly, at any rate, all went normally enough, and a fishing trip was arranged for the following morning.

"And I hope you'll bring back something for the table," his brother commented, when she had gone up to bed. "Nora has never yet brought back a single fish. God knows what she does with herself, but I doubt if she goes to the stream at all." At which an enigmatic expression passed across Dr. Leidenheim's face, though he did not speak.

"Where is this stream?" his brother asked. "Up that Goat Valley you said was queer, or something? And what did you mean by 'queer'?"

"Oh, no, not Goat Valley," came the answer; "and as for 'queer,' I didn't mean anything particular. Just that the superstitious locals avoid it even in the daytime. There's a bit of hysteria about, you know," he added, "these war days, especially in god-forsaken places like this—"

"God-forsaken is good," Dr. Leidenheim put in quietly, giving the airman an impression somehow that he could have said more but for his host's presence, while Breddle thought he would like to tap the old fellow's mind when he got the chance.

AND it was with that stressed epithet in his ears that he went up to his comfortable bedroom. But before he fell asleep another impression registered as he lay on that indeterminate frontier between sleeping and waking. He carried it into sleep with him, though no dream followed. And it was this: there was something wrong in this house, something that did not emerge at first. It was concerned with the occupants, but it was due neither to his brother, nor to the Austrian archaeologist. It was due to that strange, wild girl. Before sleep took him, he defined it to himself:—Nora

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was under close observation the whole time by both the older men. It was chiefly, however, Dr. Leidenheim who watched her.

The following morning broke in such brilliant sunshine that fishing was out of the question; and when the airman got down to a late breakfast he was distinctly relieved to hear that Nora was already out of the house. She, too, knew that clear skies were no good for trout; she had left a verbal excuse and gone off by herself for a long walk. So Breddle announced that he would do the same. His choice was Goat Valley, he would take sandwiches and entertain himself. He got rough directions from Dr. Leidenheim, who mentioned that the ruins of an ancient temple to the old god, Silvanus, at the end of the valley might interest him. "And you'll have the place to yourself," said his brother, laughingly, before disappearing into his sanctum, "unless you run across one of the young monsters, the only living things apparently that ever go there."

"Monsters! And what may you mean by that?"

It was Dr. Leidenheim who explained the odd phrase.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing at all. Your brother's a surgeon, remember. He still uses the words of his student days. He wants to scare you."

The other, finding him for once communicative, pressed him, if with poor results.

"Merely," he said in his excellent English, "that there have been one or two unpleasant births during these war years—in my language, *Missgeburt* we call them. Due to the collective hysteria of these strange natives probably." He added under his breath, as if to himself, something about *Urmenschen* and *unheimlich,* though Breddle didn't know the words.

"Oh," he exclaimed, catching his meaning "that sort of thing, eh? I thought they were always put out of the way at birth or kept in glass bottles—"

"In my country, that is so, yes. They do not live."

The airman laughed. "It would take more than a *Missgeburt* to scare me," he said, and dropped the unsavory subject be-

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fore the old archaeologist got into his stride about the temple to Silvanus and Roman remains in general. Later he regretted he had not asked a few other questions.

NOW, Anthony Breddle must be known as what is called a brave man; he had the brand of courage that goes with total absence of imagination. He was a simple mind of the primitive order. Pictures passed through it which he grouped and regrouped, he drew inferences from them, but it is doubtful if he had ever really thought. As he entered the little valley, his mind worked as usual, automatically. Pictures of his brother and the Austrian flitted across it, both old men, idling through the evening of their day after reasonable success, the latter with a painful background of bitter sufferings under the Nazis. The chat about collective hysteria and the rest did not hold his interest. And Nora flitted through after them, a nurse maybe, but an odd fish assuredly, not his cup of tea in any case. Bit of a wild cat, he suspected, for all her quiet exterior in the house. If she lingered in his mind more vividly than the other two it was because of that notion of the night before—that she was under observation. She was, obviously, up to something: never bringing in a fish, for instance, that strange look in her eyes, the decided feeling of repulsion she stirred in him. Then her picture faded too. His emotions at the moment were of enjoyment and carefree happiness. The bright sunny morning, the birds singing, the tiny stream pretending it was a noisy torrent, the fact that "Operations" lay behind him and weeks of freedom lay ahead . . . which reminded him that he was, after all, convalescing from recent fevers, and that he was walking a bit too fast for his strength.

He dawdled more slowly up the little glen as the mountain-ash trees and silver birch thickened and the steep sides of the valley narrowed, passed the tumbled stones of the Silvanus temple without a glance of interest, and went on whistling happily to himself—then suddenly wondered how an echo of his whistling could reach him through the dense undergrowth. It was not an echo, he realized with a start. It was a

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different whistle. Someone else, not very far away, someone following him possibly, someone else, yes, was whistling. The realization disturbed him. He wanted, above all, to be alone. But, for all that, he listened with a certain pleasure, as he lay in a patch of sunshine, ate his lunch, and smoked, for the tune, now growing fainter, had an enticing lilt, a haunting cadence, though it never once entered his mind that it was possible a folk tune of sorts.

It died away; at any rate, he no longer heard it; he stretched out in the patch of warm sunshine, he dozed; probably, he dropped off to sleep . . .

Yes, he is certain he must really have slept, because when he opened his eyes he felt there had been an interval. He lay now in shadow, for the sun had moved. But something else had moved too while he was asleep. There was an alteration in his immediate landscape, restricted though that landscape was. The absurd notion then intruded that someone had been near him while he slept, watching him. It puzzled him; an uneasy emotion disturbed him.

He sat up with a start and looked about him. No wind stirred, not a leaf moved; nor was there any sound but the prattle of the little stream some distance away. A vague disquiet deepened in him. Then he cupped his ears to listen, for at this precise moment the whistling became audible again with the same queer, haunting lilt in it. And he stiffened. This stiffening, at any rate he recognized; this sudden tautening of the nerves he had experienced before when flying. He knew precisely that it came as a prelude to danger: it was the automatic preparation made by body and mind to meet danger; it was—fear.

But why fear in this smiling, innocent woodland? And that no hint of explanation came, made it worse. A nameless fear could not be met and dealt with; it could bring in its wake a worse thing—terror. But an unreasoning terror is an awful thing, and well he knew this. He caught a shiver running over him; and instinctively then he thought he would "whistle to keep his courage up," only to find that he could not manage it. He was unable to control his lips. No sound issued, his lips were trem-

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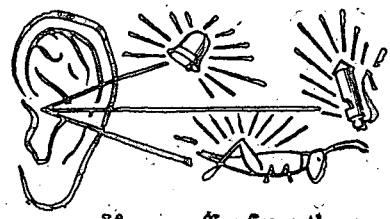

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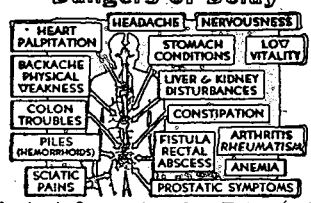

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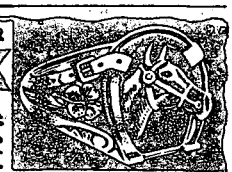

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bling, the flow of breath blocked. A kind of wheeze, however, did emerge, a faint pretence of whistling, and he realized to his horror that the other whistler answered it. Terror then swept in; and, trying feebly again, he managed a reply. Whereupon that other whistling piper moved closer in, and the distance between them was reduced. Yet, oh, what a ravishing and lovely lilt it was! Beyond all words he felt rapt and caught away. His heart, incredibly, seemed mastered. An unbelievable storm of energy swept through him.

He was brave, this young airman, as already mentioned, for he had faced death many times, but this amazing combination of terror and energy was something new. The sense of panic lay outside all previous experience. Genuine panic terror is a rare thing; its assault now came on him like a tornado. It seemed he must lose his head and run amok. And the whistler, the strange piper, came nearer, the distance between them again reduced. Energy and terror flooding his being simultaneously, he found relief in movement. He plunged recklessly through the dense undergrowth in the direction of the sound, conscious only of one overmastering impulse —that he *must* meet this piper face to face, while yet half unconsciously aware that at the same time he was also taking every precaution to move noiselessly, softly, quietly, so as not to be heard. This strange contradiction came back to memory long afterwards, hinting possibly at some remnant of resisting power that saved him from an unutterable disaster.

His reward was the last thing in the world he anticipated.

That he was in an abnormal condition utterly beyond his comprehension there can be no doubt; but that what he now witnessed registered with complete and positive clarity lay beyond all question. A figure caught his eye through the screen of leaves, a moving—more—a dancing figure, as he stood stock still and stared at—Nora Ashwell. She was perhaps a dozen yards away, obviously unaware of his presence, her clothes in such disorder that she seemed half naked, hatless, with flowers in her loosened hair, her face radiant, arms and

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legs gesticulating in a wild dance, her body flung from side to side, but gracefully, a pipe of sorts in one hand that at moments went to her lips to blow the now familiar air. She was moving in the direction away from where he stood concealed, but he saw enough to realize that he was watching a young girl in what is known as ecstasy, an ecstasy of love.

He stood motionless, staring at the amazing spectacle: a girl beside herself with love; love, yes, assuredly, but not of the kind his life had so far known about; a lover certainly—the banal explanation of her conduct flashed through his bewilderment—but not a lover of ordinary sort. And, as he stared, afraid to move a step, he was aware that this flood of energy, this lust for intense living that drove her, was at work in him too. The frontiers of his normal self, his ordinary world, were trembling; any moment there might come collapse and he, too, would run amok with panic joy and terror. He watched as the figure disappeared behind denser foliage, faded then was gone, and that he stood there alone dominated suddenly by one overmastering purpose—that he must escape from this awful, yet enticing valley, before it was too late.

How he contrived it he hardly remembers; it was in literal panic that he raced and stumbled along, driven by a sense of terror wholly new to all his experience. There was no feeling of being followed, nor of any definite threat of a personal kind; he was conscious more of some power, as of the animal kingdom, primitive, powerful, menacing, that assaulted his status as a human being . . . a panic, indeed, of pagan origin.

He reached the house towards sunset. There was an interval of struggle to return to his normal self, during which, he thanked heaven, he met no member of the household. At supper, indeed, things seemed as usual . . . he asked and answered questions about his expedition without hesitation, if aware all the time, perhaps, that Dr. Leidenheim observed him somewhat closely, as he observed Nora too. For Nora, equally, seemed her usual, silent self, beyond that her eyes, shining like stars, some-

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how lent a touch of radiance to her being.

She spoke little; she never betrayed herself. And it was only when, later, Breddle found himself alone with Dr. Leidenheim for a moment before bedtime, that the urgent feeling that he *must* tell someone about his experiences persuaded him to give a stammering account. He could not talk to his brother, but to a stranger it was just possible. And it brought a measure of relief, though Leidenheim was laconic and even mysterious in his comments.

"Ah, yes . . . yes . . . interesting, of course, and—er—most unusual. The combination of that irresistible lust for life, yes, and—and the unreasoning terror. It was always considered extremely powerful and—equally dangerous, of course. Your present condition—convalescing, I mean—made you specially accessible, no doubt. . . ."

But the airman could not follow this kind of talk; after listening for a bit, he made to go up to bed, too exhausted to think about it.

It was about three o'clock in the morning when things began to happen and the first air raid of the war came to the hitherto immune neighborhood. It was the night the Germans attacked Liverpool. A pilot, scared possibly by the barrage, or chased by a Spitfire and anxious to get rid of his bombs, dropped them before returning home, some of them evidently in the direction of Goat Valley. The three men, gathered in the hall, counted the bursts and estimated a stick had fallen up that way somewhere; and it was while discussing this, that the absence of Nora Ashwell was first noticed. It was Dr. Leidenheim, after a whispered exchange with his host, who went quickly up to her bedroom, and getting no answer to their summons, burst open the locked door to find the room empty. The bed had not been slept in; a sofa had been dragged to the open window where a rope of knotted sheets hung down to the lawn below. The two brothers hurried out of the house at once, joined after a slight delay by Dr. Leidenheim who had brought a couple of spades with him but made no comment by way of explaining why he did so. He handed one to the airman without a word. Under the breaking

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dawn of another brilliant day, the three men followed the line of craters made by the stick of bombs towards Goat Valley, as they had surmised. Dr. Leidenheim led them by the shortest way, having so often visited the Silvanus temple ruins; and some hundred yards further on the gray morning light soon showed them what was left of Nora Ashwell, blasted almost beyond recognition. They found something else as well, dead but hardly at all injured.

"It should—it *must* be buried," whispered Dr. Leidenheim, and started to dig a hole, signing to the airman to help him with the second spade.

"Burnt first, I think," said the surgeon.

And they all agreed. The airman, as he collected wood and helped dig the hole, felt slightly sick. The sun was up when they reached the house, invaded the still deserted kitchen and made coffee. There was duties to be attended to presently, but there was little talk, and the surgeon soon retired to his study sofa for a nap.

"Come to my room a moment, if you will," Dr. Leidenheim proposed to the young airman. "There's something I'd like to read to you; it would perhaps interest you."

Up in the room he took a book from his shelves. "The travels and observations of an old Greek," he explained, "notes of things he witnessed in his wanderings. Pausanias, you know. I'll translate an incident he mentions."

" 'It is said that one of these beings was brought to Sylla as that General returned from Thessaly. The monster had been surprised asleep in a cave. But his voice was inarticulate. When brought into the presence of Sylla, the Roman General, he was so disgusted that he ordered it to be instantly removed. The monster answered in every degree to the description which poets and painters have given of it.' "

"Oh, yes," said the airman. "And—er—what was it supposed to be, this monster?"

"A Satyr, of course," replied Dr. Leidenheim, as he replaced the volume without further comment except the muttered words, "One of the retinue of Pan."

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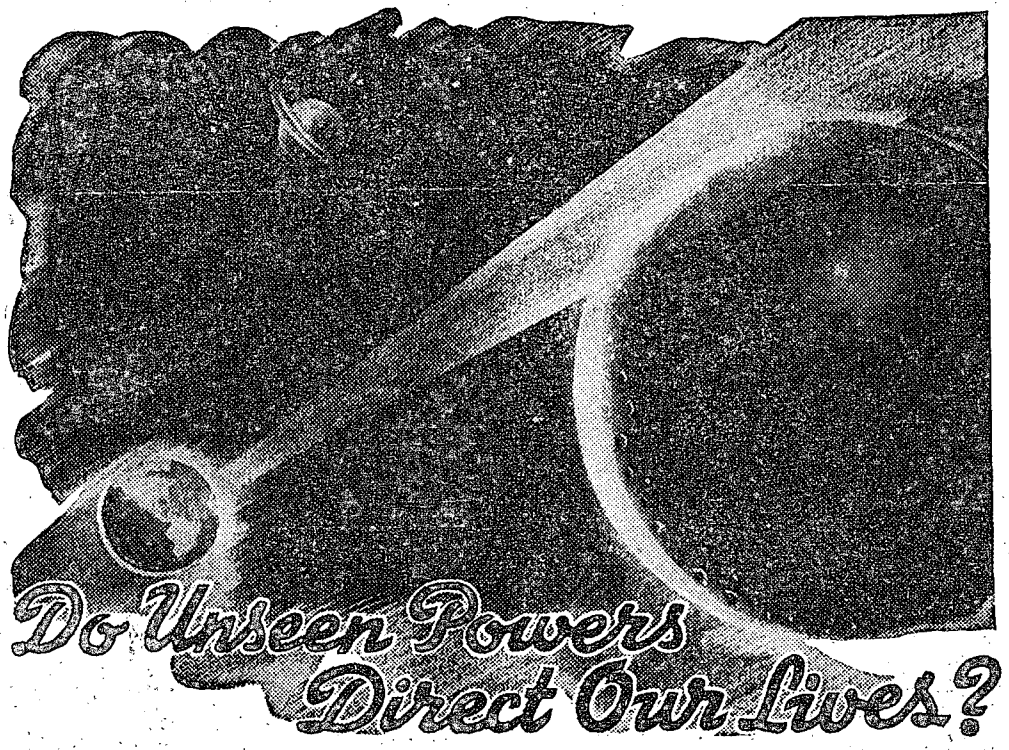

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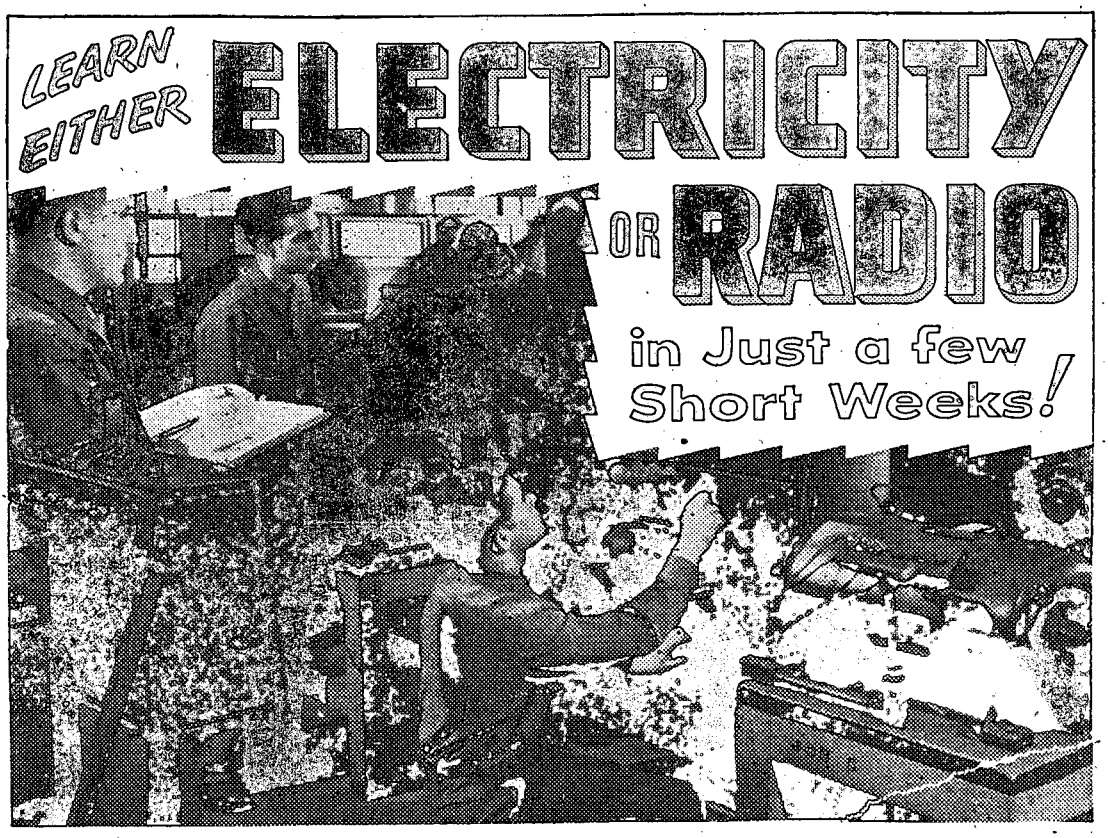

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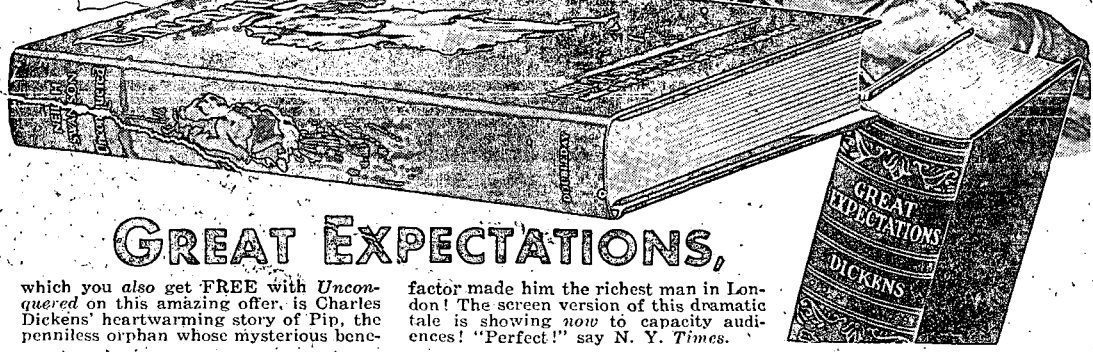

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